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**READING RUSSIA.  
A HISTORY OF READING  
IN MODERN RUSSIA**

**Volume 2**

**Edited by Damiano Rebecchini and Raffaella Vassena**

**di/segni**

Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere

Facoltà di Studi Umanistici

Università degli Studi di Milano

**Ledizioni**

© 2020 degli autori dei contributi e dei curatori per l'intero volume  
ISBN 978-88-5526-193-7

ILLUSTRAZIONE DI COPERTINA:

I. N. Kramskoi, *Woman Reading. Portrait of Sofiiia  
Kramskaia, the Artist's Wife, not before 1866*

n°32

Collana sottoposta a double blind peer review

ISSN: 2282-2097

**Grafica:**

Raúl Díaz Rosales

**Composizione:**

Ledizioni

**Disegno del logo:**

Paola Turino

STAMPATO A MILANO  
NEL MESE DI GIUGNO 2020

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## List of abbreviations

In the notes the following will be used:

d. (dd.) *delo (dela)*

ed. khr. *edinitsa khraneniia*

f. *fond*

AGE *Arkhiv Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha*, St. Petersburg.

GAIO *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Ivanovskoi oblasti*, Ivanovo.

GMT OR *Gosudarstvennyi Muzei im. L. N. Tolstogo, Otdel rukopisei*, Moscow.

IRLI *Institut Russkoi Literatury i iskusstva*, St. Petersburg.

l. (ll.) *list (listy)*

op. *opis'*

NA RT *Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Tatarstan*, Kazan'.

OR RGB *Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki*, Moscow.

OR RNB *Otdel Ruskopisei Rossiiskoi Natsional'noi Biblioteki*, St. Petersburg.

RA *Russian Anthology (Polnaia russkaia khrestomatiia, ili obraztsy krasnorechiia i poezii, zaimstvovannye iz luchshikh otechestvennykh pisatelei*, edited by A. Galakhov).

RGALI *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva*, Moscow.

RGIA *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, St. Petersburg.

## DOSTOEVSKII AND HIS READERS, 1866-1910

Raffaella Vassena

Over the thirty years that separated his debut novel *Poor Folk* (*Bednye liudi*, 1846) from his last masterpiece *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 1879-1880), Dostoevskii repeatedly had the chance to reflect on the role of the reader. While at the beginning of his career he tended to distrust the public (who “has an instinct, but lacks education”<sup>1</sup>), in the 1860s his orientation toward the reader became a fundamental element of his creative method.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that Dostoevskii wrote only what could meet the tastes of the masses; rather, he dealt with issues that concerned him personally. In order to express his convictions, without having to be subjected to the whims of the public or blackmailed by publishers, Dostoevskii did not hesitate to put his professional reputation at stake, and often risked ending up broke. And yet the conquest of a “symbolic capital”<sup>3</sup> cannot be dissociated from the scrupulous care that Dostoevskii always put into even the most practical aspects of the literary profession, and which for him were important indicators of his popularity: the fees he was paid, the development of suitable publishing strategies, the circulation of his novels

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1 Letter from F. M. Dostoevskii to M. M. Dostoevskii, 1 February 1846 (F. M. Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*. Edited and translated by D. Lowe and R. Meyer [Ann Arbor, 1989-1991], 5 vols., vol. 1, 122).

2 On “zanimatel'nost'” (captivatingness) as Dostoevskii's new artistic principle see L. P. Grossman, *Poetika Dostoevskogo* (Moscow, 1925), 7-63.

3 Pierre Bourdieu places the concept of “recognition” at the base of the different definitions of “symbolic capital”: “the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate” (P. Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1), 1989, 17); “a kind of ‘economic’ capital, denied but recognized, and hence legitimate—a veritable credit, and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, ‘economic’ profits” (Idem, *The Rules of Art. The Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* [Stanford, 1996], 142).

and the profits from sales, readers' opinions, his participation in literary evenings and public readings.<sup>4</sup> The main purpose of this chapter is to describe, through the analysis of some of these indicators, the evolution of Dostoevskii's literary reputation and the growth of his audience between 1866 and 1910. These chosen chronological limits can be explained by the role that Anna Grigor'evna Dostoevskaia (née Snitkina, 1846-1918) played in disseminating her husband's work. First as a stenographer, and then as his wife and publisher, for over forty years Dostoevskaia was the faithful guardian, guarantor, and promoter of Dostoevskii's name until 1910, when she sold the copyright. Dostoevskaia's role must therefore be considered a constant presence throughout the various periods examined, in particular the one concluding this chapter.

The methodology adopted consisted in building a dialogue between sources representing the different social actors within the literary field: not only the author, the critic and the censor, but also the publisher, the bookseller, the librarian, the pedagogue and, naturally, the reader.<sup>5</sup> In this way, the data on the fees received by Dostoevskii, the reviews of his works, the information on the volume editions and any subsequent reprints, the presence of a given work in the repertoire of his public readings, his works' presence in library catalogues, their presence in the catalogues of literature recommended for the people and for school-reading, the opinions about readings reported in memoirs, diaries, letters, and surveys—combined, they form a framework that yields a varied and dynamic system in which the differences between normative reading practices and social reading practices are particularly emphasised. Dostoevskii's path to a wide and relatively heterogeneous audience indeed was a long and complex process, conditioned by ideological, social, cultural and economic factors that also inevitably influenced the interpretation of his work. Here we will limit ourselves to highlighting the main aspects of this process, which can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, 1866-1875, i.e. from the beginning of the publication of *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*) to the publication of *The Raw Youth* (*Podrostok*), the circle of Dostoevskii's readers ideally fits into the first of the three groups identified in 1862 by the censor F. F. Veselago (see REITBLAT, "The Reading Audience of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in the present volume): educated and well-informed readers, possessing an ideological orientation similar to the author's, and able to grasp the complex moral implications of the current events behind

4 On the importance of professional reputation throughout Dostoevskii's literary career see W. M. Todd III, "Dostoevskii as a Professional Writer," in W. J. Leatherbarrow (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Dostoevsky* (Cambridge, 2002), 66-92. On the concept of "literary reputation" and, in particular on the canonisation of the classics, it is worth mentioning the study, although dated, by I. N. Rozanov, *Literaturnye reputatsii* (Moscow, 1990).

5 Cf. L. Gudkov, B. Dubin, V. Strada, *Literatura i obshchestvo: vvedenie v sotsiologiiu literatury* (Moscow, 1998).

his novels. In the second phase, 1876-1880, i.e. between the beginning of the publication of *The Diary of a Writer* (*Dnevnik pisatel'ia*) and the end of the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov*, this group of readers expanded to include a number of students and a relevant female component, who seem to look to Dostoevskii as an alternative to the progressive and revolutionary leaders of the 1860s. In particular, the phenomenon of the letters written by the *Diary* readers testifies, on the one hand, to the successful consecration of Dostoevskii and, on the other, to the evolution of the Russian public and the changes taking place in the social composition of the intelligentsia.<sup>6</sup> The third phase includes the years from the death of the writer, in 1881, until the end of Dostoevskii's publishing activity. In this period, characterised by the progressive spread of literacy and the rapid development of the book market in Russia (See REITBLAT, "The Reading Audience of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in the present volume), it is possible to identify signs of a further expansion of Dostoevskii's readers, in terms of both social composition and geographical origin. Thanks to Dostoevskii and other cultural activists, who adapted, published, and disseminated his texts in economic editions, Dostoevskii's works entered the popular circuit, reaching new audiences. Thus, Dostoevskii's literary reputation was further reshaped: having crossed the boundaries of their traditional distribution, his works generated a complex range of reactions and interpretations, even generating cases of real "creative treasons"<sup>7</sup> that have yet to be investigated.

## I. THE GREAT NOVELS OF THE 1860S AND 1870S

Dostoevskii's new orientation toward the reader found its full realization in *Crime and Punishment* which, in September 1865, he proposed to the editor of the Moscow journal *Russkii vestnik* (*The Russian Herald*), Mikhail Katkov. Accepted for publication, the novel came out in instalments between January and December 1866. Dostoevskii did his best to achieve success, which he desperately needed not only to make up for the closure of his journals *Vremia* (*Time*) and, later, *Epokha* (*Epoque*), but also to address the economic problems that afflicted him at the time. The typical elements of the feuilleton-novel, such as the police intrigue, the urban setting and the Balzac-inspired characters, the techniques he employed—the dialogues, the contrasts, the rapid changes in the scenarios, the sudden acceleration or slowing down of the narrative pace—demonstrate his desire to impress the

<sup>6</sup> V. R. Leikina-Svirskaiia, *Intelligentsiia v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka* (Moscow, 1971), 50-70.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Escarpit defines the notion of "creative treason" as a "shift of emphasis [...] obtained by discarding the author's original intentions [...] and substituting new, surmised intentions compatible with the needs of a new public" (R. Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature* [London, 1971], 23).

reader and ‘force’ him to read. Dostoevskii’s efforts were rewarded, and the publication of *Crime and Punishment* granted him a new, unexpected popularity: “I have to note that my novel is an extraordinary success and has raised my reputation as a writer. All my future depends on doing a good job of finishing it.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, sources on the spread of the novel among Russian readers, especially during its serial publication, are rather limited, and the absence of an archive of *Russkii vestnik* makes it impossible to know the precise number of subscriptions. The few existing sources report about 6,100 subscribers at the beginning of the 1860s,<sup>9</sup> and Dostoevskii himself mentions a presumed increase by five-hundred subscriptions during the publication of the novel: “In ‘67 Katkov himself, in the presence of Lyubimov and the secretary of the editorial board, told me that they had gained 500 new subscribers, attributing that to *Crime and Punishment*.”<sup>10</sup> In regards to the average subscriber to the Katkov journal, it is worth mentioning the relatively high cost of the subscription (13 roubles a year excluding shipping, 15 with shipping<sup>11</sup>), which might lead to the hypothesis that many readers used copies kept in public and reading libraries. Thus the number of actual readers of *Crime and Punishment* was far greater than that of those subscribing to *Russkii vestnik*.

As concerns the public’s reactions to the novel, primary sources from the 1866-1867 period are limited to critical reviews, twenty-three in two years.<sup>12</sup> These, however, only provide a partial picture, tainted by subjectivism and different ideological positions: the inconsistent opinions of competent readers is exemplified by the case of Ivan Turgenev, who defined the opening lines of the novel “surprising” and “remarkable,” but who then expressed himself negatively about Dostoevskii’s intricate psychologism.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, in spite of the perplexity of those who found the author excessively keen on exploring the “underground” of his characters, *Crime and Punishment* managed to get people talking. Twenty years later, the novel’s disruptive effect would thus be described by the journalist Nikolai Strakhov, an attentive observer of Dostoevskii’s literary career:

8 Letter from Dostoevskii to Ivan Ianyshv, 29 April 1866 (Ibid., 195).

9 This information is taken from the article “Zhurnal” in Brokgauz-Efron *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’* (St. Petersburg, 1890-1907), vol. 12, 64-65.

10 Letter from Dostoevskii to S. A. Ivanova, 8 March 1869 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 143). It should however be noted that the alleged increase in subscribers could also be attributed to the publication, between 1865 and 1866, of the first part of Tolstoi’s novel *War and Peace* (initially written under the title 1805), subsequently suspended after the April 1866 issue.

11 *Sbornik svedenii po knizhno-literaturnomu delu za 1866 god* (Moscow, 1867), vol. 1, 101.

12 S. V. Belov, *F. M. Dostoevskii. Ukazatel’ proizvedenii F. M. Dostoevskogo i literatury o nem na russkom iazyke, 1844-2004* (St. Petersburg, 2011), 68-69.

13 See Turgenev’s letters to M. N. Katkov of 8 March 1866, to A. A. Fet of 25 March 1866, and to I. P. Borisov of 30 March 1866 (I. S. Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, 28 vols., *Pis’ma* [Moscow-Leningrad, 1961-1968], vol. 6, 58, 66, 109). For an overview of critics’ opinions on Dostoevskii’s novel see F. M. Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 30 vols. (Leningrad, 1972-1990), vol. 7, 345 and following.

People in 1866 were reading only this, those who loved reading spoke only of this, complaining as usual about the oppressive force of the novel, about the profound impression that it made, so that healthy people almost got sick, while those with weak nerves were forced to stop reading it.<sup>14</sup>

Several circumstances contributed to the general interest in *Crime and Punishment*, some of them quite random: in January 1866, a few days before the first instalment went to press, the news reported the murder of a Moscow moneylender and his maid by a student, A. M. Danilov. In the following months, the press did not hesitate to compare the story of Raskol'nikov and that of Danilov, whose trial took place in February 1867, soon after the release of the last instalment and the novel's epilogue.<sup>15</sup> The Danilov case only emphasized the topicality of the novel: the fate of Raskol'nikov could have fallen on any lonely and penniless university student, while that of Sonia touched budding feminist sympathies, expressed here by Nadezhda Stasova (1822-1895): "While I was reading *Crime and Punishment*, I cried along with the unfortunate Sonia".<sup>16</sup> It was precisely this contemporaneity that provided the attractive force of the novel, with which Dostoevskii hoped to attract the young generation who sought in books an existential orientation and an answer to the most pressing problems of life.<sup>17</sup>

Always attentive to the promotional aspect of the writer's profession, Dostoevskii relied on charity public readings to probe the tastes of his readers. He had been taking part in these events since 1860 when, revealing an unexpectedly comic vein of his character, he had played the role of the postmaster in the presentation of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector* (*Revizor*), organized by the Russian Literary Fund on 14 April that year, in the hall of Dom Ruadze in Petersburg. He participated in public readings in subsequent years, interpreting extracts from *Poor Folk*, *Netochka Nezvanova*,

<sup>14</sup> N. N. Strakhov, "Vospominaniia o Fedore Mikhailoviche Dostoevskom," *F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 1, 491.

<sup>15</sup> See for example I-n A. (A. S. Suvorin), "Zhurnal'nye i bibliograficheskie zametki. Prestuplenie i nakazanie, roman F. M. Dostoevskogo," *Russkii Invalid*, 4 March 1867; "Bibliografiia," *Golos*, 8 March 1867.

<sup>16</sup> V. V. Stasov, *Nadezhda Vasil'evna Stasova: vospominaniia i ocherki* (St. Petersburg, 1899), 84. The novel's success also probably influenced the project of a theatrical adaptation conceived in February 1867 by the Moscow bookseller, playwright, and belletrist A. S. Ushakov, although it was never staged due to the veto of the censorship. See T. I. Ornatskaia, G. V. Stepanova, "Romany Dostoevskogo i dramaticheskaiia tsenzura (60-e gody XIX v.-nachalo XX v.)," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1974), vol. 1, 268-271. *Crime and Punishment* was first staged in 1889 (*Ibid.*, 273-274).

<sup>17</sup> On the attitude of the youth of the Sixties toward reading see A. I. Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu i drugie raboty po istoricheskoi sotsiologii russkoi literatury* (Moscow, 2009), 27-29. According to Fridlender, Russian readers perceived *Crime and Punishment* as a "physiological description of the summer of 1865" (G. M. Fridlender, *Realizm Dostoevskogo* [Moscow – Leningrad, 1964], 139).



and, in 1862, from *Notes from the House of the Dead* (*Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*), concurrent with its publication in *Vremia*. Dostoevskii chose to directly probe the mood of the public about *Crime and Punishment*, too: on 18 March 1866, on the occasion of a public reading to raise funds for the Literary Fund, he read a fragment of the second chapter of the first part (the dialogue between Marmeladov and Raskol'nikov in the tavern), just published in the first issue of *Russkii vestnik*.<sup>18</sup>

After its serial publication, interest in *Crime and Punishment* did not even begin to falter. This is proved in part by its successful publishing history, which reflects the booksellers' constant demand for it. While Dostoevskii was still alive, three editions in book form appeared: one in 1867 (in two volumes, edited by A. Bazunov), one in 1870 (the fourth volume of the first complete collection of Dostoevskii's works, edited by F. Stellovskii), and one in 1877 (in two volumes, edited by A. G. Dostoevskaia). Reprints in book form usually brought little profit to the authors, if compared to the proceeds from the serial publication of their works in thick journals, and represented a risk for publishers, as evidenced by the bankruptcy of both Stellovskii and Bazunov.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, it is significant that, even after many years, *Crime and Punishment* remained one of Dostoevskii's best-selling novels: according to Strakhov's memoirs (who had probably had access to Dostoevskaia's account records, by virtue of their collaboration on the first posthumous collection of Dostoevskii's works, in 1882-1883), at the end of the 1870s the revenue from the sales of *Crime and Punishment* was double that from the joint sales of *The Idiot* (*Idiot*), *The Possessed* (*Besy*), and *Notes from the House of the Dead*: in 1877, for example, the profits from these three novels amounted to 561 roubles and 63 kopecks, while those from the sales of *Crime and Punishment* alone reached 487 roubles and 12 kopecks. In the three following years, even if with some differences, the figures still testify to the preference given to *Crime and Punishment*: in 1878, the joint sales of *The Idiot*, *The Possessed*, and *Notes from the House of the Dead* amounted

18 Although there is no information on the reaction of the public to this evening, there are sources that attest to the exaltation of the crowd when Dostoevskii performed the same passage fourteen years later, on 28 March 1880, during a public reading for the benefit of the students of the University of St. Petersburg: "As soon as he appeared on the stage, thunderous applause broke out. F. M. read the second chapter of his novel *Crime and Punishment*. At the end of the reading, they brought him two laurel wreaths and they called him out about seven times [...] All the participants in the evening were welcomed by warm applause, but most of the ovations were for F. M. Dostoevskii." *Novoe vremia*, 30 March 1880. On Dostoevskii's public readings see R. Vassena, "Le letture pubbliche nella Pietroburgo del 19 secolo: le origini, le polemiche, i protagonisti," *Europa Orientalis*, 26 (2005), 7-33; R. Vassena, "Dostoevskii's Reading Performances," in K. Kroó, T. Szabó (eds.), *F. M. Dostoevskii in the Context of Cultural Dialogues* (Budapest, 2009), 522-528; B. N. Tikhomirov, *Dostoevskii na Kuznechnom. Daty. Sobytiia. Liudi* (St. Petersburg, 2012), 167-203. On the public literary readings organized in the 1860s by the Literary Fond see R. Vassena, "'Chudo nevedomoi sily': Public Literary Readings in the Era of the Great Reforms," *The Russian Review*, 73, 1 (2014), 47-63.

19 See Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 89.

to 1199 roubles and 50 kopecks, compared to 548 roubles and 98 kopecks from the sale of *Crime and Punishment* alone; in 1879, the proportion was 1271 roubles and 99 kopecks to 797 roubles 16 kopecks; in 1880, 1287 roubles and 20 kopecks to 933 roubles and 99 kopecks.<sup>20</sup>

We can only surmise the reasons for the success of *Crime and Punishment*, but even the most limited and latest existing sources suggest that, in his readers' imagination, Dostoevskii's fame as a 'psychologist' was linked precisely to the story of Raskol'nikov and Sonia. Sof'ia E. Lur'e, a Jewish girl student from Minsk, wrote to the author, in 1877: "It is customary to consider you a psychologist, thanks to your Raskol'nikov."<sup>21</sup> Three years later, a third-year student at Moscow Theological Academy, I. V. Livanskii, paid tribute to the quality of the psychological analyses of *Crime and Punishment's* author. In thanking Dostoevskii for donating his works to the academy's library, Livanskii recounts how these students went literally crazy for them, and defined the effect of reading Dostoevskii in a way diametrically opposed to how a good portion of critics did:

Yes, the reader's attention is involuntarily drawn to works like yours, highly-respected Fedor Mikhailovich—one not only reads them, he gets excited about them, no, more than this, one wishes that everyone would consider them in the same way, that everyone would experience that deep pleasure, that feverish tension that one himself feels while reading them...<sup>22</sup>

After having noted the pleasant state of exaltation that Dostoevskii's works created, Livanskii expresses his preference for *Crime and Punishment*,

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20 Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 504-505. In his 9 November 1878 letter to his wife, Dostoevskii wrote that of 109 roubles 90 kopecks given to him by the Moscow librarian Solov'ev, *Crime and Punishment* alone accounted for 87 roubles (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 63). *Crime and Punishment* was especially demanded by *Diary of the Writer* subscribers, to whom Dostoevskii gave a 10 percent discount (see his 21 July 1878 letter to L. V. Grigor'ev, in Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 55).

21 Letter from S. E. Lur'e to Dostoevskii, 7 May 1877, in "Neizdannnye pis'ma k Dostoevskomu," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg, 1996), vol. 12, 216. Lur'e's words were probably inspired by Dostoevskii, who in his previous letter responding to Lur'e—in which she had exalted Hugo's *Les Misérables*—had written: "I very much like *Les Misérables* myself. It came out at the time my *Crime and Punishment* did (that is, it came out two years earlier). The late F. I. Tyutchev, our great poet, and many other people found at that time that *Crime and Punishment* was incomparably superior to *Les Misérables*. But I argued with everyone sincerely, with all my heart, which I am certain of even now, despite the general opinion of all our authorities." (Letter to S. E. Lur'e, 17 April 1877, Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 366). There is no evidence of such statement from Tiutchev, which Dostoevskii quotes at least two more times: in his 9 April 1876 letter to Kh. D. Alchevskaia (Ibid., 277) and in his 1875-1876 notebooks (Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 24, 119).

22 Institut Russkoi Literatury i iskusstva (IRLI), St. Petersburg., f. 100, n. 29762, letter of 14 February 1880.

which he read in just three days, enthralled by the depth of the author's psychological acumen:

I will always remember with what spasmodic attention and how breathlessly, during three whole days, still in my second year at the Seminary, I read your famous novel *Crime and Punishment*, and even now, at the mere memory of what I read and well assimilated, I feel all the authentic vitality of this marvellous novel, all the immense force of its impressive psychological analysis [...] Many more of us have felt and still feel the same sensations, under the effect of this and your other novels, the latest being *The Brothers Karamazov*. We consider ourselves lucky to have been able to randomly buy five samples of *Crime and Punishment* and one sample of *Notes from the House of the Dead*.<sup>23</sup>

The success of *Crime and Punishment* did not seem to repeat itself—at least not immediately—with *The Idiot* (released in *Russkii vestnik* between January and December 1868), in which Dostoevskii, by his own admission, focused not so much on the “effect” as on the “essence.”<sup>24</sup> The initial curiosity about the novel is reflected in the reviews of the first chapters that appeared in the press; these were described in enthusiastic terms by Apollon Maikov in a letter to Dostoevskii of February 1868,<sup>25</sup> and confirmed in a letter by Stepan Ianovskii of 12 April of the same year.<sup>26</sup> However, cooler reactions followed, citing the fanciful world of the novel, so different from the contemporary quality of Raskol'nikov's adventures:

The impression is this: terribly powerful, with flashes of genius (for example, when they slap the idiot, and what he says, and several other elements), but throughout the story there is more probability and likelihood than truth [*istina*]. Perhaps the most real character is the Idiot (will this seem to you strange?), all the others live as in a fantasy world, all are illuminated by a light

23 Ibid.

24 See how Dostoevskii defines the idea of *The Idiot* in his letter to S. A. Ivanova of 29 March 1868: “the idea is one of those that seizes you by its essence, not by a showy effect” (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 70).

25 “... I have the honour to inform you of some very pleasant news: it is a success. The great curiosity, the interest in the many terrible moments experienced personally, the original character of the hero [...] the general's wife, the promise of something great in Nastas'ia Filippovna, and much, much more has attracted the attention of many with whom I have spoken...” (A. Maikov, “Pis'ma k F. M. Dostoevskomu,” publ. T. N. Ashimbaeva, in *Pamiatniki kul'tury. Novye otkrytiia. Ezhegodnik 1982* [Leningrad, 1984], 65, 66-67).

26 “All the masses, all are unquestionably enthusiastic! [...] everywhere, in clubs, in small salons, in railway carriages, they speak only of Dostoevskii's latest novel, from which, from what they say, “it is impossible to break off until the very last page” (F. M. Dostoevskii. *Stat'i i materialy* [Leningrad, 1924], vol. 2, 375-376).

that, while intense and characteristic, is also fanciful and peculiar. One reads it in one breath and, at the same time, one cannot believe it. Conversely, it is as if *Crime and Punishment* were explaining life; after reading it, you see life more clearly.<sup>27</sup>

The sense of disbelief aroused by *The Idiot*, despite Dostoevskii's attempts to defend its realistic character,<sup>28</sup> resulted in a lower number of reviews in the periodical press, which amounted to ten between 1868 and 1869,<sup>29</sup> and yielded a lack of profit for *Russkii vestnik*: "*The Idiot*, I believe, could not have provided any new subscribers; I'm sorry about that, and that's why I'm very glad that in spite of the novel's apparent failure, they are still hanging on to me".<sup>30</sup> Among the few sources available concerning the reception of *The Idiot*, one often finds two typical ways of accepting Dostoevskii's 'rhetoric of pain.' The first is represented by a letter sent to Dostoevskii in the late 1860s by a provincial reader, Aleksandr I. Selevin (?-1910), a notary from Elizavetgrad. Selevin seems to derive some moral benefit from the pain he felt in identifying himself with the events of Dostoevskii's characters, which leads him to repeatedly reading *The Idiot*:

I re-read all of your works (I read *The Idiot* almost a hundred times, and it seems to me I will never tire of rereading it) with such enthusiasm, in such a morbid (if I may say) and feverish state... How much have I reflected and suffered, so that I cannot but thank you for those thoughts, those ideas, which I derived from reading your works.<sup>31</sup>

Those same impressions for which Selevin is grateful to Dostoevskii (and which years later another exceptional reader, Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov, will similarly record<sup>32</sup>) represent a torment for the second type of reader, Fedor N. Kitaev, from Petersburg. A typical representative of the 1860s generation and an avid reader of Nikolai Chernyshevskii's *What Is To Be Done?* (*Chto delat'?*), Kitaev certainly caught the polemical referenc-

27 See Maikov's letter to Dostoevskii of 14 March 1868 (Maikov, "Pis'ma k F. M. Dostoevskomu," 65, 66-67).

28 In his reply Dostoevskii objected to Strakhov's remarks: "I still believe in the absolute truth of Nastasya Filipovna's character, however. By the way: many little things at the end of the first part are taken from nature, and certain characters are simply portraits, for instance, General Ivolgin, Kolya. But your judgment may in fact be very accurate" (21-22 March 1868, Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 60).

29 Belov, *Ukazatel' proizvedenii F. M. Dostoevskogo*, 69.

30 Letter to S. A. Ivanova, 8 March 1869 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 143).

31 See A. I. Selevin's undated letter to Dostoevskii in "Neizdannnye pis'ma k Dostoevskomu," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1976), vol. 2, 299.

32 "I have got Dostoevskii's *Idiot*. When you read his works you seem to go crazy." From a note on K. Romanov's diary, 9 March 1879, in L. Lanskii (ed.), "F. M. Dostoevskii v neizdannoii perepiske sovremennikov (1837-1881)," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Moscow, 1973), vol. 86, 135.

es to Chernyshevskii that featured in Dostoevskii's novel. In particular, Dostoevskii's technique of treating similar situations (for instance, the love triangle between Myshkin, Nastas'ia Filippovna, and Rogozhin) in a diametrically opposed manner and denouncing its destructive effects on the protagonists did not escape Kitaev, making his experience of *The Idiot* particularly burdensome.<sup>33</sup> In a 1879 letter to the historian and literary scholar E. S. Nekrasova (1842-1905), Kitaev recalls the pleasure of reading a 'realistic' work like *Notes from the House of the Dead* and, conversely, the sense of oppression caused by reading *The Idiot*, where the author forces the reader to relive the same torments of the characters:

As you could not hear about Chernyshevskii, so now I can't about Dostoevskii. With great satisfaction I once read his *Dead House*, then with less and less satisfaction I read what followed, but when *The Idiot* appeared, I could not even finish it, so unpleasant was the impression it aroused in me. This way of writing, this pleasure in rubbing salt into wounds already so deep and hard to heal is not to my taste. This attitude towards the phenomena of ordinary physical and psychic human life reminds me of those poor cripples, half-naked and covered with sores who, with false moans, drag on their nags in the bazaars of villages, and try to attract the attention and the sympathy of the public in any way possible. Dostoevskii is like those cripples.<sup>34</sup>

Kitaev highlights an aspect of Dostoevskii's work that, according to some, made it unsuitable for those with weak nerves, regardless of their social status: "I have read very little Dostoevskii; his works act morbidly on me (I am a very nervous person)"<sup>35</sup>, was the answer that in 1895 a painter and academician of the Imperial Academy of Arts, Baron Mikhail P. Klodt (1835-1914), gave to a survey about the Russians' favourite books. On this characteristic feature of Dostoevskii's writing and on its heterogeneous effects we will return soon. In any case, Kitaev's judgment echoes the accusation made by several contemporaries regarding Dostoevskii's tendency to pour useless pain into his novels, all the more damaging because it lacked a reason and, above all, an antidote. As for the controversial receipt of *The Idiot*, we should also consider its difficult publishing history after first being released

<sup>33</sup> For an insight on the connection between the two novels and in general on the polemic between Dostoevskii and Chernyshevskii, see I. Paperno, *Chernyshevsky and the Age of Realism. A Study in the Semiotics of Behavior* (Stanford, 1988), 155-156 and passim.

<sup>34</sup> Letter from F.N. Kitaev to E.S. Nekrasova, 21 November 1879 ("F. M. Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 491).

<sup>35</sup> M. Lederle, *Mneniia russkikh liudei o luchshikh knigakh dlia chteniia* (St. Petersburg, 1895), 41. On Lederle's survey see J. Brooks, "Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era," in W. M. Todd III (ed.), *Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914* (Stanford, 1978), 103-105.

in instalments: despite Dostoevskii's repeated attempts to find a publisher,<sup>36</sup> the first version in book form, edited by his wife, only came out in 1874 with a circulation of two thousand copies, at the cost of 3.5 roubles per copy.<sup>37</sup> In more than one letter, Dostoevskii himself regretted not being able to realize his 'idea' in his novel,<sup>38</sup> and although many years later he declared he had had proof of the public's approval,<sup>39</sup> it is significant that *The Idiot* did not appear in his repertoire of public readings: Dostoevskii was aware that the deep meaning of the novel could only be communicated to a restricted category of reader, one characterized by "something special in his mental make-up that has always surprised me and pleased me".<sup>40</sup>

A similar fate befell the next novel, based on a new "impactful idea" with which Dostoevskii intended to redeem himself after *The Idiot's* lack of success: "I now have in mind an idea for an enormous novel that, in any case, even if a *failure*, ought to produce an effect—actually because of its topic. The topic is *atheism* [...]. That *has* to intrigue the reader."<sup>41</sup> Two years later, on the first 1871 issue of *Russkii vestnik*, the first episode of *The Possessed* appeared. During the first months of its publication, Strakhov reported to Dostoevskii, who was stationed in Dresden, on the progress of the novel in increasingly less encouraging tones, noting in particular that it was generally incomprehensible due to its unclear plot: if moderate optimism prevailed in February ("Your novel is read with greed, it's already a success, even if not one of the biggest. The next parts will probably make it very big"), in April and then again in June the situation became much more critical due to Dostoevskii's excessively convoluted way of writing:

... the public is now very confused; they cannot see the purpose of the story and are lost in the multitude of characters and epi-

36 On 26 October 1868 Dostoevskii wrote to Maikov: "And now the idea of *The Idiot* has nearly gone bust. Even if there is or will be some merit, there's little striking effect, and striking effect is essential for a second edition, which I was counting on blindly just a few months back and which could have provided some money. Now, when the novel isn't even finished, there's no point even in thinking of a second edition" (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 104). A few months later, on 15 May 1869, Dostoevskii asked Maikov to broker a deal with the librarian Bazunov: "Please drop by to see him at his shop and ask him whether he's willing to publish *The Idiot* for 2000 (I don't want to go down to 1500)" (Ibid., 167). Eventually Dostoevskii received an offer from the librarian Stellovskii, but the deal did not come to a successful conclusion.

37 Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 504.

38 See Dostoevskii's letter to S. A. Ivanova on 25 January 1869: "I am dissatisfied with the novel; it hasn't expressed even a tenth part of what I wanted to express, although I nonetheless do not disown it and I still love my unsuccessful idea" (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 3, 127).

39 See for example what Dostoevskii wrote in his 1876 notebooks: "Who among the critics knows the end of *The Idiot* (a scene of such force, that is not repeated in literature)? Well, the audience knows it" (Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 24, 301).

40 Letter from Dostoevskii to A. G. Kovner, 14 February 1877 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 351).

41 Letter from Dostoevskii to S. A. Ivanova, 25 January 1869 (Ibid., vol. 3, 128).

sodes, and the link between them is not clear to them [...]. You write especially for a chosen audience but, in the meantime, you botch up your works, you complicate them too much. If the texture of your stories were simpler, they would be more effective. For example, *The Gambler* and *The Eternal Husband* have impressed the public a great deal, but all you have poured into *The Idiot* has been wasted.

All around me I can hear them discuss animatedly—some are reading it with great passion, others are perplexed.<sup>42</sup>

The discordant opinions recorded by Strakhov are partially reflected in the reactions of two educated readers of different ideological orientations. The first is the radical feminist Anna Filosofova (1837-1912), one of the founders of the Bestuzhev Courses for women. Although linked to Dostoevskii by a feeling of deep respect and friendship, in her memoirs Filosofova also recalls her tense discussions with him, exacerbated because of their different positions: “I very often behaved toward him in the most unseemly fashion. I shouted at him and battled with him with unseemly anger, and he, the dear man, patiently bore all my sallies. At that time I couldn’t digest his novel *The Possessed*. I said it was an outright denunciation [of the young radicals - R. V].”<sup>43</sup> The second reader is Pavel A. Viskovatov (1842-1905), the son of the general A. V. Viskovatov (1842-1905), a historian of literature and the biographer of M. Iu. Lermontov. In his letter to Dostoevskii dated 6 March 1871, Viskovatov joins the author of *The Possessed* in condemning liberalism à la Turgenev, such as that which was represented in the novel by characters like Verkhovenski. A typical example of the 1840s generation of ‘fathers’ possessed of a liberal and Westernizing orientation, Verkhovenski became the object of the sarcasm not only for the author of the novel, but also for his ideal reader:

The history of the development of our society in the last decades is clearly outlined, and to the fortunate expression of A. N. Maikov, according to whom you have represented the end of the Turgenev heroes, I add my hope that you will be able to bury other heroes too, delivering them to posterity forever. Alone in my room I have laughed wildly, reading about Stepan Trofimovich and the people with whom he meets and spends time. Our audi-

42 See N. N. Strakhov’s letters to F. M. Dostoevskii respectively of 22 February, 12 April and 8 June 1871 (*Shestidesiatye gody. Materialy po istorii literatury i obshchestvennomu dvizheniiu* [Moscow-Leningrad, 1940], 269-274). Strakhov’s first letter referred to chapters 1 and 2 from Part One, published in the January issue of *Russkii vestnik*; the second letter might refer to chapters 3 and 4, published in the February issue, and the third letter might refer to chapter 5, published in the April issue, in which the story of Stavrogin is narrated.

43 A. V. Tyrkova, *Anna Pavlovna Filosofova i ee vremia* (Petrograd, 1915), 258.



ence is very volatile. I do not know how they will receive your excellent work, but all the attentive and sincere people will follow the developments of the novel with interest and impatience.<sup>44</sup>

Both readers judge *The Possessed* not as a novel but as a political pamphlet, to be appreciated only by those who share the author's *Weltanschauung*. This may explain the merely partial success that, in the early 1870s, the novel achieved among the public: some periodicals even came to question the author's sanity,<sup>45</sup> reproaching his abrupt turnaround from the revolutionary and socialist ideals of the Petrashevskii circle towards Slavophile and conservative ideals. The oscillating mood of the public is also confirmed by other indicators: first of all, the poor demand of the book market, with only one edition in book form of the novel, published in 1873 by Dostoevskaia. In her memoirs, Dostoevskaia reports in detail the story of the publication of *The Possessed* in book form, which marked the beginning of her publishing activity, lasting almost forty years: three thousand copies were sold within a year, with a profit of about four thousand roubles, while the remaining five hundred copies were sold over the following three years.<sup>46</sup> The decline in the demand for *The Possessed* did not seem to change in the second half of the 1870s, when Dostoevskii's popularity reached its peak: at least that is what can be deduced from the absence of the novel from Dostoevskii's repertoire of public readings which, with due caution, can be considered representative of the tastes of the different types of audiences whom Dostoevskii addressed.<sup>47</sup>

In 1875, *The Raw Youth* appeared in Saltykov-Shchedrin and Nekrasov's *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*). The progressive *Otechestvennye zapiski* was a difficult choice for a venue, in that it contrasted with Dostoevskii's political ideas but remained in line with his professional ambitions: forced to reject the disadvantageous conditions offered him by *Russkii vestnik*, which meanwhile was publishing Lev Tolstoi's

44 "Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 420. In the 1860s I. S. Turgenev had reached the peak of popularity thanks to his novel *Fathers and Sons* (1861). See Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 78.

45 It was exactly at the same time as the publication of *The Possessed* that the term "painful" (*boleznennyi*) would begin to be reported, not only referring to Dostoevskii's novels but also to his person. See "Z." [V. P. Burenin], "Poiavlenie snova besov v *Russkom vestnike*," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 16 December 1872; Z., "Zhurnalistika," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 6 January 1873, n. 6; "A. S." [A. S. Suvorin], "*Russkii vestnik* (noiabr' i dekabr')". *Besy F. Dostoevskogo*," *Novoe vremia*, 16 January 1873.

46 A. G. Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moi zhizni – Fedor Dostoevskii. Vospominaniia. 1846-1917* (Moscow, 2015), 304. About the history of the publication of *The Possessed* see *Ibid.*, 298-305. On Dostoevskaia's publishing activity, especially related to Dostoevskii's *Collected works*, cf. I. S. Andrianova, *Anna Dostoevskaia: prizvanie i priznaniia* (Petrozavodsk, 2013), 26-44.

47 *Spisok ustnykh vystuplenii s 1876-1880 gg. Fedora Mikhailovicha Dostoevskogo. Otdel rukopisei Rossiiskoi Gosudarstvennoi Biblioteki (OR RGB), Moscow. Otdel rukopisei, f. 93, razd. III, kart. 5, ed. khr. 17, ll. 1-2.*



*Anna Karenina*, Dostoevskii accepted Nekrasov's proposal.<sup>48</sup> The fact that *The Raw Youth* failed to be published in *Russkii vestnik* is indicative of the delicate position that Dostoevskii still occupied in those years, as shown also by a comparison of his rates with those of other authors: while in 1875 Katkov granted Tolstoi 500 roubles per printer's sheet for *Anna Karenina*, and while Turgenev received 400 roubles respectively for *Fathers and Sons* (*Ottsy i deti*) and *Smoke* (*Dym*) in 1862 and 1867, what Dostoevskii had obtained from Katkov for *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Possessed* did not exceed 125 roubles per printer's sheet.<sup>49</sup> His collaboration with *Otechestvennye zapiski*, however, marked an increase in Dostoevskii's fee, which went up to 250 roubles per printer's sheet.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, perhaps also due to the commotion caused by Dostoevskii's collaboration with Prince Vladimir Meshcherskii's *Grazhdanin* (*The Citizen*) in 1873, the critics' interest in *The Raw Youth* was greater than that accorded to previous novels: in 1875 alone, it received thirty-one reviews.<sup>51</sup>

As for common readers, even in this case there are not many sources that can provide a clear picture. Presumably, the excessively intricate style of Dostoevskii also made *The Raw Youth* an uneasy reading, accessible only to educated readers, and appealing only to a part of them. Kitaev, a quintessential 'man of the Sixties' who had failed to finish *The Idiot*, expressed himself similarly about *The Raw Youth* in 1875: "I could not bring myself to finish Dostoevskii's *The Raw Youth*; it is a worse blotch than *The Possessed*, the whole story is full of demented and subjective reasoning".<sup>52</sup> Besides these sporadic comments by readers, it is possible to make some suppositions based on contemporary reprints, which also in the case of *The Raw Youth* were limited to only one (published in 1876 by the Petersburg publisher P. E. Kekhrbardzhi, on terms that Dostoevskii himself did not consider very favourable<sup>53</sup>). As for other works by Dostoevskii, the available contemporary sources on the reception of *The Raw Youth* date back to the late 1870s-early

48 In any case, as Todd rightly remarks, the ideological distance from *Otechestvennye zapiski* (*The Notes of the Fatherland*) was a minor problem: Nekrasov's populism in the Seventies was incomparably closer to Dostoevskii than radicals' nihilism in the Sixties. See W. M. Todd III, "Dostoevskii kak professional'nyi pisatel': professiia, zaniatie, etika," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 58, 6 (2002), 15-43.

49 L. K. Il'inskii, "Gonorary Dostoevskogo," *Bibliograficheskie listy Russkogo bibliograficheskogo obshchestva*, 3 (1922) 8. On Turgenev's remuneration see Turgenev, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, vol. 4, 365; vol. 6, 93.

50 With regard to the criteria for the determination of the fees see Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 93 and following pages.

51 Belov, *F. M. Dostoevskii. Ukazatel'*, 73-74.

52 Letter from F. N. Kitaev to E.S. Nekrasova, 18 May 1875 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 441).

53 See what Dostoevskii writes to his younger brother Andrei on 10 March 1876: "I'm sending you my book, which was published in a quite slovenly way by the bookseller Kekhrbardzhi. He published it, advertised it in the newspapers, stuck it away somewhere and didn't put it on sale until 2 months later, which damaged the book" (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 274).

1880s, when Dostoevskii's popularity skyrocketed, and people began to read or re-read even his previous works. In the case of *The Raw Youth*, public readings can be of help. As we have seen, Dostoevskii had participated in public readings since the beginning of the 1860s, but it was only towards the end of the 1870s when, after a period of decline, these events experienced some renewed popularity, and his performances became particularly requested: Dostoevskii's name had now become a guarantee of the success of the evening, and organizers were literally competing for him. For his part, Dostoevskii was always very sensitive to the fundraising purposes of these events: for this reason, he accepted the invitations willingly, submitting himself to real *tours de force* and declining only if forced to for health reasons. Dostoevskii used to select the extracts he would read very carefully. In choosing a fragment, he was guided by precise criteria: first of all, there was the need not to run into the veto power of the censors, to whom the texts in the programme had to be submitted in advance. Then, he would want to tickle the appetites of the public by presenting a preview of the novels that were still being published (in the case of *The Brothers Karamazov*), or that had just been published (in the case, as seen, of *Notes from the House of the Dead* or *Crime and Punishment*). Finally, he felt he should empathize with the kind of public in favour of whom the charity reading had been organized, while also paying attention to the performers who would precede or follow him on stage. However, Dostoevskii's main criterion remained the educational mission, in which he felt particularly invested, to reach the young generation.

According to the available sources, after its publication, *The Raw Youth* was read in public at least once, on 21 March 1880 in St. Petersburg, in the hall of the Blagorodnoe sobranie, on the occasion of a literary-musical evening benefiting the students of the Bestuzhev Courses for women. Dostoevskii was particularly attached to these courses—the first advanced courses for women in Russia, inaugurated in St. Petersburg in 1878—and gladly appeared among the members of the charitable society dedicated to them, presided over by the aforementioned A. P. Filosofova.<sup>54</sup> For these young students, Dostoevskii had already read, on 14 December 1879, a fragment from *The Insulted and the Injured*, focusing on the figure of the young child Nelly and arousing much emotion among the audience. For the evening of 21 March 1880, Dostoevskii chose a passage from *The Raw Youth* that could serve as an explicit warning to the young female students sitting in the audience: the story of the mother of the suicide victim Olia (Part I, chapter 9, paragraph 5). This passage of the novel had received much praise

<sup>54</sup> *Obschestvo dlia dostavleniia sredstv Vysshim zhenskim kursam. Otchet za 1878-79 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1896), 50.

from Nekrasov, who had called it “the summit of art”<sup>55</sup>; the reactions of readers had been similar, as reported by Strakhov in one of his usual bulletins:

Your second part was very successful; it was read with the utmost attention. The episode of the girl who hanged herself is extraordinarily good and has aroused much praise. The conclusion of this part finally reveals the mutual positions of the characters, outlining both Versilov and the raw youth. This clarification acts very positively on the reader and arouses strong interest. [...] You have chosen a magnificent theme and everyone expects a miracle from its development; at least, I expect it; the audience is already subdued, and will read you eagerly.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Dostoevskii’s choice was harshly criticized by the press of the time, who deemed it inappropriate to present to a public of young women the story of a girl their same age, who had arrived in Petersburg in search of lessons but was deceived, forced into prostitution, and induced to take her own life by her feelings of shame.<sup>57</sup> The indignation of the press was nourished by the impression that Dostoevskii’s reading had had on the public, and of which we find testimony in the memoirs of two young women students. The first, A. A. Von Brettsel (? -1932), who later became the wife of Dostoevskii’s personal physician, Ia. B. Von Brettsel, limited herself to describing the moment of confusion the audience had experienced at the end of such an inspired and realistic interpretation of Olia’s suicide scene: “Dostoevskii read in a low voice, but one so inspired as to instil terror, you seemed to experience that terrible scene yourself. The effect was such that the applause did not arrive immediately. Only when the first strong impression had passed, did the audience burst into applause”.<sup>58</sup> In the recollection of the second witness, S. V. Karchevskaia (1859-1947), who later became the wife of the physiologist I. P. Pavlov, the effect that the reading had on those present in the hall was similar to a phenomenon of real mass hysteria:

At the end of the reading, a real pandemonium broke out. The audience shouted, banged, broke the chairs and cheered in delirium: “Dostoevskii!”. I do not remember who passed me my coat. I put it on and cried from euphoria.<sup>59</sup>

55 Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 29/2, 13.

56 Letter from N.N. Strakhov to Dostoevskii, 21 March 1875 (*Shestidesiatye gody*, 274).

57 A. S., “Literaturnoe chtenie,” *Peterburgskaia gazeta*, 25 March 1880, 59.

58 A. A. Von Brettsel, “Moi vospominaniia o Dostoevskom i Turgeneve,” edited by I. S. Zil’bershtein, in *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 86, 320.

59 S. V. Pavlova, “Iz vospominanii,” *Novyi mir*, 3 (1946), 117.

Although certainly influenced retrospectively by the image of Dostoevskii as a ‘prophet’ that would express itself after his death, Von Brettsel and Pavlova’s memoirs are in line with many other testimonies about his public readings of those years: they contain the same emotional upheaval, the same enthusiasm mixed with hysteria shared by those who listened to Dostoevskii read in public between 1879 and 1880. The reasons for these reactions are to be sought not only in the audience’s aesthetic discernment, or in the ideological convergence or in the ease of identification with Dostoevskii’s characters, but also in the involvement of the audience with Dostoevskii’s persona, who by now had assumed the role of a ‘public celebrity.’

## 2. DISCOVERING THE REAL READER: THE DIARY OF A WRITER AS WORKSHOP

If the 1860s and early 1870s novels had consolidated his fame as a novelist, the real crowning of Dostoevskii’s career came relatively late, with the publication of *The Diary of a Writer*, in 1876-1877. Dostoevskii’s idea to publish a periodical that was meant not as a news journal, but as a “diary in the full sense of the word,”<sup>60</sup> proved to be successful. Every month, in the pages of *Diary*, Dostoevskii dealt with the most burning issues of current reality, starting from his personal experience as a man and a writer, using both journalistic and artistic language: as Gary Saul Morson states, in *The Diary of a Writer*, the “I” of the journalist and the “I” of the novelist alternate to achieve the same effect on the reader who becomes capable of reading not only vertically but also horizontally, across genres.<sup>61</sup>

Dostoevskii devoted himself exclusively to this creature for two years, as the sole author of all the articles and the only person in charge (together with his wife) of all phases of its editing, promotion, and distribution to the public. Completed on the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of each month, each issue of *The Diary of a Writer* was subjected to preliminary censure by N. A. Ratynskii. Once the censor approved it, the issue came out on the 29<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> from V. V. Obolenskii’s printing house, having a maximum format of two printer’s sheets (about 32 pages) and thus being much smaller than the standard format of thick journals (which had up to 40 printer’s sheets). It was then distributed by subscription or retail sales, although some letters show that Dostoevskii attempted to spread his new publication through special part-

<sup>60</sup> See Dostoevskii’s letter to Vsevolod Solov’ev, 11 January 1876 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 270).

<sup>61</sup> G. S. Morson, “Dostoevsky’s Great Experiment. Introductory Study,” in F. Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, Volume One, 1873-1876, trans. Kenneth Lanz (Evanston, 1993), XXXIII. On the *Diary of a Writer* see also I. L. Volgin, *Dostoevskii-zhurnal’ist (“Dnevnik pisatel’ia” i russkaia obshchestvennost’)* (Moscow, 1982); D. A. Martinsen, “Dostoevskii’s *Diary of a Writer*: Journal of the 1870s,” *Literary Journals in Imperial Russia*, ed. by D. A. Martinsen (Cambridge, 1998), 150-168; R. Vassena, *Reawakening National Identity. Dostoevskii’s Diary of a Writer and its Impact on Russian Society* (Bern, 2007).

nerships with publishers of other magazines from the Russian provinces.<sup>62</sup> The circulation of the first January 1876 issue was set at two thousand copies, but the demand of the public immediately forced Dostoevskii to proceed to a second, and in some cases a third, reprint. Sources report about 1,982 subscribers at the end of 1876, to whom some 2,000 copies for retail sale should be added; in 1877, up to 3,000 copies were printed each month for subscribers and just as many for retail sale.<sup>63</sup> If we consider the runs of the thick journals of the time that, in contrast to *The Diary of a Writer*, had a substantial editorial apparatus, Dostoevskii's enterprise appears even more remarkable: adding up the various reprints, the run of *The Diary of a Writer* oscillated between 4,000 and 6,000 copies per month, while, for example, that of *Otechestvennye zapiski* reached about 8,000 subscription copies, without counting retail sales.<sup>64</sup> In any case, the total number of *Diary* readers was greater than just the amount of published copies, for at least three reasons: first, copies kept in public institutions (which 1877 Igor' Volgin calculates at 161 copies, distributed in different amounts to libraries, schools, editorial offices, military institutes, courts, and charitable associations<sup>65</sup>) were available to more readers; second, it was common practice (especially in the provinces) to share one single copy and take turns reading it, as suggested by some letters from the *Diary* readers;<sup>66</sup> finally, a single copy of the *Diary* could be used in group readings, as the Kharkiv activist educator Khristina Alchevskaia mentions in her letter to Dostoevskii of 19 April 1876.<sup>67</sup>

A. G. Dostoevskaia took charge of the promotional and accounting part of the work. As the person who was mainly in charge of shipping and distributing *The Diary of a Writer*, Anna Grigor'evna was responsible for establishing as many contacts as possible with the booksellers from all the cities in Russia:

62 See I. L. Volgin, "Redaktsionnyi arkhiv *Dnevnik* pisatel'ia (1876-1877)," *Russkaia literatura*, 1 (1974), 154-158.

63 Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 300; M. A. Aleksandrov, "F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh tipografskogo naborshchika v 1872-1881 godakh," in *F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. 2, 279, 280.

64 In 1877 N. K. Mikhailovskii himself hypothesized that about 8,000 subscriptions corresponded to around 100,000 readers, since each copy was read by several people (N. K. Mikhailovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* [St. Petersburg, 1913], vol. 10, 812). On the success of *Otechestvennye zapiski* see R. J. Ware, "A Russian Journal and Its Public: *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 1868-1884," *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 14 (1981), 121-146.

65 Volgin, "Redaktsionnyi arkhiv *Dnevnik* pisatel'ia (1876-1877)," 159.

66 See for instance the letter written to Dostoevskii by a teacher from Kishenev, L. S. Matsevich, on March 7, 1876: "I wish to thank you most sincerely for me and for all those who asked me to read your *Diary*" (IRLI, f. 100, n. 29775).

67 Kh. D. Alchevskaia, *Peredumannoe i perezhitoe. Dnevnik, pis'ma, vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1912), 68-69.

The *Diary* is going very well. In addition to yearly subscribers (up to one and a half thousand), the retail is going very well. We print six thousand copies of the *Diary* and we sell almost all of them. Yet, since I am not content with the circulation of the *Diary* in Petersburg and Moscow, I distribute it all over the provinces and I sent it to some librarians with whom I am acquainted in Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov and Kazan'. I'm receiving good news from there: for instance, in just a few days Dubrovin in Kazan' sold 125 copies of one issue and he asked me to dispatch to him up to one hundred copies every month, and in the other cities the retail is going very successfully as well.<sup>68</sup>

Anna Grigor'evna's accuracy and precision in her task are evidenced by some of her notebooks, where she noted the addresses of those who subscribed to *The Diary of a Writer* in 1877: according to Volgin's calculations, there were 478 subscribers in the cities of Moscow and Petersburg and 1,542 in the provinces.<sup>69</sup> The data reported by Volgin provide an idea of how vast a geographical area the distribution of the *Diary* covered and, in particular, of the greater amount of subscribers in the provinces compared to those from the capitals: Dostoevskii himself would implicitly identify the reasons for this ratio in that the "genuinely Russian people,"<sup>70</sup> who were more inclined to accept his message, resided in the provinces and not in the large Europeanized cities.

At any rate, the diffusion of *The Diary of a Writer* in the Russian provinces probably had other more practical reasons: the first lies in its low cost (2 roubles for the annual subscription, and 30 kopecks for each single issue), competitive with respect to the prices of thick journals<sup>71</sup> to which the *Diary*, different in its format but not in the type of content, was a valid alternative.<sup>72</sup> The second reason may lie in the cultural isolation that afflicted the provinces, and that led the most educated provincial readers to welcome with particular enthusiasm any possibility of contact with other representatives of the intelligentsia. In this regard, Khristina Alchevskaia was among the first to express her gratitude to Dostoevskii for having changed his image

<sup>68</sup> Letter from A. G. Dostoevskaia to A. M. Dostoevskii, 11 March 1876 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 447).

<sup>69</sup> I. L. Volgin, "Redaktsionnyi arkhiv Dnevnika pisatel'ia," *Russkaia literatura*, 1 (1974), 158-159.

<sup>70</sup> See Dostoevskii's 17 December 1877 letter to S. Ianovskii (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 401).

<sup>71</sup> For example, the cost of yearly subscription to *Otechestvennye zapiski* was 14 roubles and 40 kopecks (Ware, "A Russian Journal and Its Public," 131).

<sup>72</sup> See for example the letter written to Dostoevskii by A. Guladze from Kutais, who asked to send the *Diary of a Writer* as it was useful for "those youths who do not have the opportunity to buy thick journals because of their high cost" (Volgin, "Redaktsionnyi arkhiv Dnevnika pisatel'ia (1876-1877)," 156).

through *The Diary of a Writer*. He had overcome the myth of abstractness and unattainability to which every writer was long relegated by the provincial reader:

To us, provincial people, every writer seems something nearly mythical, inaccessible, unimaginable, and mysterious. We just get to read him, that's all! We are deprived of the possibility of seeing, hearing, or corresponding with him. What would happen to a writer if provincial people attacked him with their letters? Some satirists said that Pisarev drowned not in a river, but in the sea of letters he received from the provinces.<sup>73</sup>

Alchevskaia's words proved prophetic: attracted by the name of the novelist, readers responded enthusiastically, writing to Dostoevskii from every corner of Russia and in some cases even contributing concretely to the journal. Although Dostoevskii spoke with amazement of "hundreds of letters"<sup>74</sup>, and that same information appears in other contemporary and belated sources,<sup>75</sup> archives yield evidence of 204 letters received during the publica-

<sup>73</sup> "Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 448. Alchevskaia presumably referred to the success that the radical critic D. I. Pisarev had achieved in the 1860s as a contributor to the magazine *Russkoe slovo* (1859-1866), not without an ironic reference to his tragic death by drowning, which occurred in 1868.

<sup>74</sup> See Dostoevskii's letter to Liudmila Ozhigina dated 17 December 1877: "The *Diary* has also given me many happy moments, specifically by allowing me to find out how educated society is in sympathy with my activity. I have received hundreds of letters from all over Russia and have learned a great deal that I had not previously known" (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 399). On the same day he wrote to Stepan Ianovskii: "Approving letters, and ones even sincerely expressing love, have come to me by the hundreds. Since October, when I announced the cessation of publication, they have been coming daily, from all over Russia, from all (the most diverse) classes of society, with regrets and with requests not to give it up" (Ibid., 400).

<sup>75</sup> So remembers the typesetter M. A. Aleksandrov: "Towards the end of the first year of publication of *Diary of a Writer*, which had become a considerable phenomenon in the second year, a relationship between Fedor Mikhailovich and his readers developed that had no equal in Russia: readers showered him with letters and cards thanking him for the extraordinary 'moral food' represented by *The Diary of a Writer*" (Aleksandrov, "F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh tipografskogo naborshchika v 1872-1881 godakh," 281). Strakhov also recalls this phenomenon in similar terms: "In recent years, particularly since the publication of *The Diary of a Writer*, Dostoevskii was showered with letters and visits. He received missives from completely unknown people from all over Petersburg and from every part of Russia. They addressed him with requests for help, since he devotedly supported the poor and sympathized with the difficulties and misfortunes of others; but they also constantly came to express their admiration, with questions, with complaints about others, or with objections to his work. The letters were also similar. He had to discuss, to ask, he received many demonstrations of the fact that his words had not gone unnoticed, he met many people who brought him comfort with their own qualities of mind" (Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 519). See also the memoirs of E. P. Letkova-Sultanova: "No Russian writer was ever so successful in the so-called 'society' as Dostoevskii was [...]. Hundreds of letters were written to him, and he considered it his duty to answer; since the morning he was introduced to people, old and young, looking for an answer to the questions that afflicted them, or wishing to express their devotion, and he welcomed



tion of *The Diary of a Writer*. The amount includes various types of letters: letters on current issues dealt with in the pages of *The Diary of a Writer*; letters which, apart from requesting a subscription, also included a brief opinion on the journal; letters with requests for specific topics that the journal might address; and finally, confessional letters with requests for moral and spiritual advice, as well as letters with requests for material assistance.

Regarding the places of origin of the letters, 99 come from Petersburg and Moscow, and the remaining 105 from other Russian cities and provinces. Among the letters, 176 are signed while 28 are initialled or remain completely anonymous, even if some of the correspondents who initially preferred to remain anonymous revealed their name in a subsequent letter. The majority of those who wrote to Dostoevskii were students, mainly males, and well-represented professional categories among his correspondents are aspiring journalists, writers, and teachers, followed by clergymen and employees, as well as (to a lesser extent) doctors, lawyers, artists, soldiers and—even if only in a couple of cases—workers and peasants.

To fully grasp the significance of the phenomenon of the letters written by the readers of *The Diary of a Writer*, it is necessary to consider things from a dual point of view: firstly, from the microcontext of Dostoevskii's literary and journalistic activity; secondly, from the macrocontext of the Russian literary world of the 1870s, especially vis-à-vis the European one. As for the former, the catalogue of Dostoevskii's archival materials, released in 1957 by V. S. Nechaeva, can be of help. It has a record of all the letters (over five hundred) received by Dostoevskii over about forty years of his career, each with a brief description of their content. Of these, more than two hundred concern the years 1876-1877; of the remaining ones, at least two hundred others are from 1878-1880; about a hundred concern preceding years. To this figure, one should add a certain number of letters that have not reached us, of which we find evidence in the notes to Dostoevskii's correspondence in the academic edition of his complete works. In addition to the clear numerical majority of letters dated from 1876 compared to those of previous years, also worthy of note are the new type of correspondent represented therein (i.e. those not pertaining to Dostoevskii's circle of family members, friends and acquaintances) and the new type of content covered in the letters: before 1876, the letters dealt mainly with family or professional matters, while after 1876 many letters touched on the current topics dealt with in the pages of the *Diary*.

As has been said, Dostoevskii himself, on several occasions, expressed his amazement at the quantity of letters he received, and his contemporaries similarly noted the exceptionality of the phenomenon. The letters to

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them all, listened to everyone, believed it his duty not to reject anyone." (*F. M. Dostoevskii v vospominaniakh sovremennikov*, vol. 2, 457). According to A. S. Dolinin, Dostoevskii received up to 400 letters a year (see *F. M. Dostoevskii, Pis'ma* [Moscow, 1928-1956], vol. 3, 5). On the reasons for the loss of part of the letters there is no reliable source.



Dostoevskii often open with *captatio benevolentiae* formulas showing that the correspondent was aware that they were resorting to an unorthodox practice, at least in Russia:

You will certainly be amazed at my impudence [...] I address you as my favourite writer and I ask you to set a day and an hour when you are free to see me. If my idea is too insolent, I ask you to excuse it due to my young age and ignorance of good manners. Well, in France people turn to Proudhon for advice, not to mention Dumas [...] why then should I not address you as a mature and educated person, with the request to be my mentor?<sup>76</sup>

It is precisely these concurring sources that suggest Dostoevskii's case represents something, if not unique, then at least out of the ordinary: the archival collections of other Russian writers that we have consulted up to now endorse this thesis, which can be further verified in the future.<sup>77</sup> By restricting the field of inquiry exclusively to the realm of journalism, the hypothesis that other journals received mail from their readers is certainly plausible and partly verified: for example, between the 1870s and the 1880s, many wrote to the editors of *Otechestvennyye zapiski* to praise the ideas expressed in the journal, ask for advice on what to read, or communicate their intention to dedicate themselves to the cause of the people.<sup>78</sup> The decline of the traditional system of values and the diffusion of a utilitarian and materialistic concept of life intensified the need to find new points of reference, which could substitute for those, by now ineffective, of the past; in a similar context, a 'monojournal' such as *The Diary of a Writer* encouraged the establishment of an almost personal relationship between the author and the reader.

During the same period, the context was quite different in Europe, where writing to authors had been an observable practice, at least in France, since as early as the end of the eighteenth century. Critical studies dedicated to Rousseau, Dumas, Sue, Balzac in France show how the deep social and cultural but also literary motivations that led the readers of the time to write to their favourite authors changed and developed in line with, on the one hand, the evolution of the genre of the novel and, on the other, the con-

<sup>76</sup> S. E. Lur'e's letter to Dostoevskii, 25 March 1876, in Volgin, "Pis'ma chitatelei k F. M. Dostoevskomu," *Voprosy literatury*, 9 (1971), 181-182.

<sup>77</sup> Dostoevskii's only other contemporary writer who would also become the recipient of not hundreds but thousands of letters from strangers would be Lev Tolstoi, though only starting from the late nineteenth century. So far, our research has focused on Tolstoi's collected correspondence, and in part on those of Nekrasov and Turgeniev.

<sup>78</sup> Ware, "A Russian Journal and Its Public." On the popularity of thick journals in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century see Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 32-47.

secration of the man of letters as a public authority.<sup>79</sup> Even if the letters that Dostoevskii received from his readers may be traced back to the same reasons—notwithstanding the specificity of the Russian socio-cultural context compared to the European one—this phenomenon remains inextricably linked to the nature of *The Diary of a Writer*: a delicate combination of different genres, from autobiographical prose to fiction, political pamphlet and feuilleton, thanks to which the author's persona is communicated to the reader, conveying an impression of familiarity and authority at the same time. Through the *Diary*, the novelist who, probing the depths of the soul of his heroes had repeatedly forced his readers to “talk with their own conscience,”<sup>80</sup> finally revealed a man in flesh and blood. The feeling of having entered into communion with him led some to develop a sort of ‘symbiosis’ with his persona, which in many cases turned into a real cult. There were those who considered the renewal of the subscription as a moral duty;<sup>81</sup> those who expected Dostoevskii to provide them with spiritual help; those who solemnly swore loyalty to him;<sup>82</sup> those who showed fetishistic behaviours<sup>83</sup> or mythomania, transposing autobiographical episodes reported in *The Diary of a Writer* into their own life;<sup>84</sup> and even those who compared Dostoevskii to Christ<sup>85</sup> or a prophet and the *Diary* to the Holy Scriptures:

79 See R. Darnton, “Readers Respond to Rousseau: The Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity,” in Idem, *The Great Massacre and Other Episodes of French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), 215-225; J. Smith Allen, *In the Public Eye. A History of Reading in Modern France, 1800-1940* (Princeton, 1991); J.-P. Galvan, *Les mystères de Paris. Eugène Sue et ses lecteurs* (Paris, 1998); J. Lyon-Caen, *La lecture et la vie. Les usages du roman au temps de Balzac* (Paris, 2006). On the writer as a secular version of ‘spiritual authority’ in modern France see P. Bénichou, *The Consecration of the Writer 1750-1830* (Lincoln, NE, 1999).

80 Kharkiv University's Professor N. N. Beketov (1827-1911) wrote to Dostoevskii on 23 February 1877: “While reading your works one talks with his own conscience. Such is their universal meaning” (I. L. Volgin, “Dostoevskii i russkoe obshchestvo [Dnevnik pisatel'ia 1876-1877 godov v otsenakh sovremennikov],” *Russkaia literatura*, 3 [1976], 123).

81 See the letter written between August and September 1877 by the provincial reader Iu. Miuller from Krestsy: “Dear Mr. Fedor Mikhailovich! I have recently become acquainted with your *Diary of a Writer* of the last year by chance, and in consequence of that I deem it a duty, precisely a duty, to subscribe it for the current year. In our everyday, godforsaken life, honest beliefs such as yours are as necessary as any moral shaking.” (Dostoevskii, *Pis'ma*, vol. 3, 390).

82 See the letter from anonymous woman “A. M.” from St. Petersburg to Dostoevskii, 9 February 1876, in “Epistoliarne materialy,” *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg, 1992), vol. 10, 206.

83 “How I will treasure your letter! I shall take care of it as of a holy thing!” the gymnasium student V. Fausek wrote to Dostoevskii on 30 October 1876. See R. Vassena, “Vy ne mozhetе ne sochuvstvovat' nam, bednym studentam. Pis'ma studentov k Dostoevskomu,” *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (St. Petersburg, 2005), vol. 17, 332. Judith Lyon-Caen points to fetishistic collection of portraits or autographs as one of the practices that mark the consecration of the literati in early nineteenth-century France (Lyon-Caen, *La lecture et la vie*, 109).

84 In her 28-29 March 1877 letter to Dostoevskii, the aforementioned Sofia Lur'e wrote about an event happened to her in a library in Minsk that resembled a similar one reported by the *Diary* author in the October 1876 issue.

85 Vassena, “Vy ne mozhetе ne sochuvstvovat' nam, bednym studentam. Pis'ma studentov k Dostoevskomu,” 332.

Dear Mr. Fedor Mikhailovich,

In our contemporary rotten press you appear as an Ancient Prophet [...]. When our printed word lost its individuality to the point of worthlessness, you alone began, away from this trend, 'to proclaim the eternal teachings of love and truth' in your *Diary*. You rightly limited each issue of the *Diary* to 1 or 2 quarto pages. This is what, alongside its contents of course, makes us involuntarily respect every word in it, and we read it as if it were the Holy Scripture.<sup>86</sup>

There were aspects of Dostoevskii's editorial policy that most likely encouraged the phenomenon of letter-writing. Firstly, the announcements advertising *The Diary of a Writer* featured Dostoevskii's personal address at the bottom, to which subscription requests had to be addressed. Even casually seeing the address on the pages of a newspaper was sometimes enough to stimulate the reader's desire to personally verify if the 'real' Dostoevskii was up to his fame:

While glancing through the newspapers with the hope to find some advertisements by any benefactor, I casually came across your surname and address. You yourself experienced many things in your life, therefore you can also understand the anguish of another, though unknown, man.<sup>87</sup>

No less effective were those sections from 1877 specifically dedicated "To the readers," in which Dostoevskii communicated directly with his audience, informing them of the state of his health or apologizing for the delay in his answers. In any case, it was in May 1876 that Dostoevskii inaugurated the practice of publishing extracts from his readers' letters, using them to start off his reflections on current issues. In doing so, he probably stimulated the initiative of other readers; for example, a Kiev librarian, who wrote to him the following month, started out in these terms: "Fedor Mikhailovich! Apparently, many people write to you. So do I."<sup>88</sup>

Dostoevskii kept the letters he received in high esteem: in more than one case, he used them as ideas for his reflections, answering them privately or publicly, and sometimes even going so far as to elevate the authors

86 Letter from Kartashov, Dmitrovsk ("Epistoliarne materialy," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* [St. Petersburg, 1992], vol. 10, 206–07).

87 Letter of 13 November 1876 from G. Glinskii, a student of the St. Petersburg Imperial Medical Academy. See Vassena, "Vy ne mozhetе ne sochuvstvovat' nam, bednym studentam. Pis'ma studentov k Dostoevskomu," 334.

88 Letter to Dostoevskii written by Grebtsov from Kiev, 8 June 1876 ("Neizdannye pis'ma k Dostoevskomu," in S. V. Belov (ed.), *Dostoevskii i ego vremia* [Leningrad, 1971], 272–273).

to ‘heroes’ of *The Diary of a Writer*.<sup>89</sup> Thanks to the letters of his readers, Dostoevskii managed to delve into the causes of the main social scourge that the *Diary* intended to eradicate: dissociation (*obosoblenie*), a pervasive tendency to break links with the past and to move away from the Russian Orthodox tradition and the moral values it preserved.<sup>90</sup> Directly feeling the moods of different parts of the Russian society allowed Dostoevskii to better calibrate the transmission of *Diary of a Writer*’s educational message and to carry out his main task, which he formulated in clinical terms:

It is not enough to accuse, one must seek remedies as well. I think that there are remedies: they are to be found among the *narod*, in the things the *narod* hold sacred, and in our joining with the *narod*. But... but more about that later. I undertook my *Diary* in part for the purpose of speaking about these remedies, insofar as my abilities permit me.<sup>91</sup>

The letters of his readers thus assume a double meaning: they are not to be considered simply a reaction to *The Diary of a Writer*, because, at the same time, they actively contributed to the realization of its purpose. For example, the letters that Dostoevskii received during 1876 helped him shape the 1877 edition of the *Diary*, in which, intervening in the debate on the conflict between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire, he consciously touched his audience’s most sensitive spots. One could speak of a sort of “imagined community”<sup>92</sup> of the *Diary* readers, united at once by a nationalistic ideology and a submissive docility that would allow them be ‘awakened’ by the ‘logic of the heart’ of Dostoevskii’s discourse. Thus a school teacher from the Tver’ region wrote, following the first two years of the publication:

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89 Dostoevskii planned to devote one section of the *Diary* to his correspondence with readers, as he writes to his wife on June 21, 1876: “It’s too bad, dear, that you didn’t send me the letter by the provincial who criticizes me. I need it for the *Diary*. There’s going to be a section there called ‘A Reply to Letters that I Have Received’” (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 4, 313). This project was not ultimately carried out.

90 “Judging only by the letters I receive personally, I could draw a conclusion about one extremely important fact of our Russian life which I have already hinted at indirectly not long ago: namely, that everyone is restless, everyone wants to participate in everything, everyone wants to express an opinion and state his views; the one thing that I cannot make up my mind about is whether each person wants to dissociate himself through his opinions or join his voice in one common, harmonious choir.” F. Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*. Translated and annotated by K. Lantz (Evanston, Ill., 1994), 472. On how social disintegrations reflected in Dostoevskii’s writing style see K. Holland, *The Novel in the Age of Disintegration: Dostoevsky and the Problem of Genre in the 1870s* (Evanston, Illinois, 2013).

91 Dostoevsky, *A Writer’s Diary*, 740.

92 B. Anderson, *Imagined communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York, 1991).

I cannot but thank you for your sincere, straightforward, and sobering words. In the thick fog your words always touched first the heart, and subsequently the mind came into its own and was brightened with the logic of your thought.<sup>93</sup>

In a similar way, others before him had expressed their gratitude, such as this reader from Mirgorod:

I cannot refrain from expressing my sincere gratitude for the immense happiness I felt reading your *Diary*, which forced me, and anyone who read it, to cry and laugh. I happened to read each issue as many as three times, and every time I felt a unique joy, for we have such great writers, who [are able to] sober the mind and heart.<sup>94</sup>

Like provincial readers, noble and educated readers, such as the painter Ekaterina F. Iunge (1843-1913), could not escape its fascination even as they sensed the utopian character of this apparent 'logic':

During the war, when sometimes the soul was so afflicted as to leave me without strength, only *The Diary of a Writer* gave me relief. Sometimes I happened to read and think: "All this is utopia," but meanwhile inside you could feel something sweet and consoling, because there you saw a heart that loved.<sup>95</sup>

In the author's final years, critics located the main reason for Dostoevskii's popularity precisely in his being a spokesman for the utopian image of a severe but just Russia, powerful but magnanimous, ready for war but a guarantor of peace: "Not the whole of Dostoevskii's artistic personality, but only some of his ideas are successful; [...] they applaud him not for what is dear to him, but for what is dear to those who applaud him".<sup>96</sup> Although his correspondents represent only a portion of *The Diary of a Writer's* audience, their letters provide us with a certain picture of Russian society in the second half of the 1870s, specifically of some specific categories of readers fascinated by Dostoevskii's message. Particularly noteworthy are the letters of female

93 Letter to Dostoevskii written by N. Gorelov from Torzhok, 26 January 1878 (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Literatury i Iskusstva [RGALI], Moscow, f. 212, d. 1 69). Partly published: Volgin, "Dostoevskii i russkoe obshchestvo," 135).

94 Letter to Dostoevskii by M.M. Danilevskii from Mirgorod, 13 November 1876 (IRLI, f. 100, n. 29690). Partly published: Volgin, "Dostoevskii i russkoe obshchestvo," 133.

95 See E. F. Iunge's undated letter to A.I. Tolstaia ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 497).

96 S. A. Vengerov, "Dostoevskii i ego populiarnost' v poslednie gody," *Otklik: Literaturnyi sbornik v pol'zu studentov i slushatel'nits vysshikh zhenskikh kursov g. S.-Peterburga* (St. Petersburg, 1881), 280.

readers, which reveal signs of a new social awareness and a specific way to relate to journalism and literature, which may constitute a useful, though not exhaustive, comparison with other periods examined in this volume.

### 3. THE FEMALE READERS OF THE DIARY OF A WRITER

*The Diary of a Writer* has given me the means to see the Russian woman at closer hand; I have received some remarkable letters; they ask me, who know so little, 'What is to be done?' I value these questions, and by being frank I try to compensate for my lack of knowledge in answers.<sup>97</sup>

This author's confession opened the *Diary* issue of May 1876. We have already discussed elsewhere the Dostoevskian conception of the social role of women and the way it was expressed in *The Diary of a Writer*.<sup>98</sup> Here it may be appropriate to summarize the distinctive features of women's letters. It is easy to distinguish two categories of letters, even if the division is not to be understood in a rigid way: on the one hand, confessional letters in which the correspondents pose questions of a moral and spiritual nature to Dostoevskii; on the other, letters dedicated to the problem of the role of women in society, in terms of work, civil rights, married life, and education. What unites both categories is their high degree of identification with the female characters created by the novelist, who in the *Diary* seemed to have revealed his true face: "Then you are as good in life as you are in your novels!".<sup>99</sup>

One of the first correspondents of *The Diary of a Writer* was an anonymous young woman from St. Petersburg, A. M., who, in her letter of 9 February 1876, clearly described the various phases that had marked her initial 'meeting' with the novelist and, later, the man himself: first, the reading of his novels, of which the correspondent herself felt to be a protagonist and to which she traced the origins of her 'symbiosis' with Dostoevskii ("I came out entirely from the pages of your works. I am your creation and your semblance too"<sup>100</sup>); then, the contemplation of the portrait of Dostoevskii painted by V. G. Perov and shown at the Second Wanderers' Exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1872 ("In it I see your soul, your inner appearance, I see you exactly as you must be"<sup>101</sup>), and finally the *Diary*'s 'revelation'. Precisely because of this acquired intimacy, the reader felt entitled to ask Dostoevskii

97 Dostoevsky, *A Writer's Diary*, 501-502.

98 Vassena, *Reawakening National Identity*, 147-167.

99 Letter to Dostoevskii by K. V. Nazar'eva from St. Petersburg, 7 February 1877. Volgin, "Pis'ma chitatelei k F. M. Dostoevskomu," 180.

100 "Epistoliarne materialy," 204.

101 Ibid.

to explicitly address in *The Diary of a Writer* the problem of the condition of women.<sup>102</sup> This feeling of symbiosis with Dostoevskii also led some readers to address him with a certain temerity and a peremptory tone, especially after the praises he addressed to women from the pages of the May and June 1876 issue, in relation to the nascent *Movement for the Liberation of the Slavic Brothers*:

I want, I demand the truth from you, and you must tell me this in the name of precisely that Christian love you preach [...] Why so much praise for women? Out of respect for their actual qualities and strengths, or was it just a momentary fashion, not without a hidden hint of irony? Or is it a fanciful theory, a topic that one can modify as one likes [...] but there can be a cruel gap between saying and doing...Do not be offended by my lack of trust and the hardness of my questions, we have been deceived so many times that we no longer believe solely in beautiful words, however spoken with affection. To tell you the truth, I turned to you because one has to, really has to turn to someone, and I do not know anyone, but you seem more sincere, and after all I believe you more than I do others.<sup>103</sup>

The letters of women correspondents show an acute sense of disillusionment, perhaps as a result of a now extinct infatuation with radical ideas about gender equality that had spread in the 1860s. From Dostoevskii, women demand not only coherence: they request a new word, which may rise above those who, from the stands and in the press, pontificate on the rights or duties of women. Thus writes an anonymous woman from Kiev after reading the July-August 1876 issue of the *Diary*, in which Dostoevskii entrusts a rather sharp statement on the vocation of women to the voice of the Paradoxicalist, the author's imaginary interlocutor of sorts:

Dear Mr. Fedor Mikhailovich!

I subscribe to your *Diary*, sometimes I read it with pleasure, sometimes even with enthusiasm, as for example the article "On Love of the People" in the February issue. As I love reading you and I never forget you as the author of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, I got very upset at reading your thoughts about the need for every woman to bear as many children as possible (July-August). Although you call the author of this statement a Paradoxicalist, what he says is so close to some of your beloved views

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 205-206.

<sup>103</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii from St. Petersburg, signed "Deeply respecting you" (Gluboko uvazhaiushchaia vas), 4 September 1876, (IRLI, f. 100, n. 29948).

(for instance, about children), that I easily traced the reflection about the need to bear children back to your own theories. [...] Repudiate your recipe for women's happiness, otherwise I will stop reading you, even if that would be a great loss for me in view of my sympathy for many of your ideas.<sup>104</sup>

The letters written by women readers differ from those written by men in their mode of reading, one absolute and all-encompassing, intending to interpret every word of the *Diary* as the literal expression of the author's opinion. The correspondents charge Dostoevskii with the task of answering the most urgent questions, without distinction—whether they dealt with the social dimension of women or with more intimate aspects:

Will you answer me, then? Advise me, dear Mr. Dostoevskii, on how to recover my intellectual abilities in my studies. How can one obtain strength and patience, and finally tell me, in conscience, can a person live when she realizes that she is not worthy of living, when she has lost hope in herself and has been left only with contempt for her own misery? I am sure of your clemency, Mr. Dostoevskii; you alone can understand every state of the human soul!<sup>105</sup>

This exclusive talent attributed to Dostoevskii by the reader brings us back to that 'rhetoric of pain' towards which women showed to be particularly sensitive. Since the days of *Poor Folk*, the critics had focused their attention on Dostoevskii's mastery in describing human suffering: commenting on the famous scene of Makar Devushkin's ripped button, Vissarion Belinskii had identified the characteristic of the author's genius in his compassion for the weak;<sup>106</sup> speaking of the works that had followed *Poor Folk* and which had marked the end of the hopes he had first placed in the young writer, Belinskii had then spoken of some of his characters' "nervous" nature;<sup>107</sup> on the subject of *The Insulted and the Injured*, Nikolai Dobroliubov had shifted his attention to the problem of the reception of Dostoevskii's works, highlighting as a specific feature his tone capable of provoking "nervous pain," which tormented the reader to such an extent

<sup>104</sup> Letter of 29 September 1876, signed "One of your subscribers." First published in Vassena, *Reawakening National Identity*, 159-160.

<sup>105</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii written by O. A. Antipova from St. Petersburg (Vassena, "Vy ne mozhete ne sochuvstvovat' nam, bednym studentam. Pis'ma studentov k Dostoevskomu," 340).

<sup>106</sup> V. G. Belinskii, "Peterburgskii sbornik" (1846), in Idem, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1953-1959), vol. 9, 555-563.

<sup>107</sup> See Belinskii's letter to P. V. Annenkov, 20 November 1847 (Belinskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 12, 430). Belinskii referred to the characters of *The Landlady* (*Khoziaika*).



that he was forced to explore the labyrinths of his own “underground”.<sup>108</sup> In the following years, it was common among critics to refer to Dostoevskii’s novels in such terms as “painful” or “nervous,” epithets actually due more to the author’s *Weltanschauung* than to his narrative style, until in 1875 Aleksandr Skabichevskii coined the evocative image of the two “doubles” that would cohabit the very personality of the writer: the “bright double” and the “gloomy double”.<sup>109</sup> If, as we have seen, some readers shared the perplexities of the critics, women readers seemed more inclined to see in the depth of his analysis proof of Dostoevskii’s sincere dedication to those who suffer, all the more authentic because it arose from personal experience: “You are the poet of suffering; you are the nicest, the deepest Russian writer. You have suffered for your talent. That is why your works turn man upside down, and force him to look inside himself with terror”.<sup>110</sup>

Many women confess they have no one else to turn to: “Speak, because I have nobody to ask”;<sup>111</sup> “I believe in you as no other person in the world; nobody illuminates my spirit like you do.”<sup>112</sup> The *Diary* author becomes, for his female correspondents, a more authoritative figure than their families and turns into an object of intense trust, going far beyond the limits of the traditional author-reader relationship. Female readers do not hesitate to unveil the darker sides of their personality: convinced that the artistic talent of Dostoevskii is able to solve not only important social issues, but also the most intimate problems both daily and private, they try to involve him in their family or romantic dramas, they confess to him their anxieties about the future, they ask him to be their guide, they seek advice, they await a word of comfort with confidence. These letters reflect the gradual transition from admiration for the novelist to an increasingly all-encompassing involvement with Dostoevskii’s persona, which led many to attribute to him a sort of “omnipotence,” which he himself could not believe.<sup>113</sup> Admiration

<sup>108</sup> N. A. Dobroliubov, “Zabitye liudi” (1861), in Idem, *Pervoe polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 4 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1911), vol. 4., 855-912.

<sup>109</sup> “Zauriadnyi chitatel’,” “Mysli po povodu tekushchei literatury,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 6 February 1875, n. 35 e “O g. Dostoevskom voobshche i o romane *Podrostok*,” *Birzhevye vedomosti*, 9 January 1876.

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii written by K. V. Nazar’eva from St. Petersburg, 3 February 1877 (Volgin, “Pis’ma chitatelei k F. M. Dostoevskomu,” 180).

<sup>111</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii written by L. F. Surazhevskaiia from Tver’, 17 December 1876 (“Neizdannye pis’ma k Dostoevskomu,” *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* [Leningrad, 1976], vol. 2, 309).

<sup>112</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii written by the listener of Bestuzhev Courses A. I. Kurnosova, 11 January 1880. See I.L. Volgin, *Poslednii god Dostoevskogo* (Moscow, 2010), 91-99, 140.

<sup>113</sup> See what Dostoevskii wrote to M. A. Iazykov on 14 July 1878, about the requests for material help he kept receiving from readers: ““You” they say, “are righteous, kind, and sincere person—that is clear from everything you have written, and therefore do a favor for us, too, and find a position” and so on and so forth. Most characteristic of all is that they consider me to have ties to everyone on whom the dispensing of positions depends. I have to write refusals in reply to all these letters, because I can’t carry out even a tenth of the requests, and this has all

for the novelist and the journalist changed into a cult of his personality; the characters created by his imagination became the term of comparison with one's own life, the criterion by which to measure one's anguishes and pains. Such is the case of a reader from Tver', who first calls her family situation more tragic than that which led *The Meek One (Krotkaia)* to commit suicide, and then presses Dostoevskii for his opinion on a type of woman like Anna Karenina:

My children! And to none of them can I give even just one hour of happiness, I do not have the power to save even one of them from the thoughts and fate of your Meek One. At least she was luckier: she did not bear such a weight on her shoulders, she did not have little baby hands reaching out to her, she did not have to say to herself that she had to live. She decided she could not, and threw herself, and did not have to retrace her steps and say to herself "I cannot do it, I cannot—but I will live, I cannot, I cannot—but I must"; and on and on again until the end, until the end [...]. Please forgive my inopportune sincerity, but my mother is dead, my father is far away, and my husband and all the officers are different from me: I would not say anything to them; I do not love them, I do not seek their opinion, I do not want it and I do not fear it. You, on the other hand, I have been listening to you for a long time, and you seem good to me [...] And then: have you read *Anna Karenina*? Do you justify it? You defend Sonia Marmeladova, but would you have a kind word for Anna Karenina? Do you justify the love of a married woman, a mother-woman? Do you? And I am not talking about myself, but this is also an unresolved question for me. So far, no one has dealt with it. They say many things and represent women like Karenina, but they are two completely different things, a woman who leaves her husband, and a woman who stays with her husband but betrays him, and loves another. Is that not so?<sup>114</sup>

Perhaps even to avoid having to answer such questions, in *The Diary of a Writer* Dostoevskii did not explicitly return to the subject of the social role of women. For the Dostoevskii of the late 1870s, not only the progressive ideals of female education, but also the conservative and patriarchal ones,

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brought me a lot of anguish. I cannot understand why Alfimov appealed to me too, that is, why he too considers me so *omnipotent*" (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 53.)

114 Letter from L. F. Surazhevskaiia from Tver', 17 December 1876 ("Neizdannnye pis'ma k Dostoevskomu," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* [Leningrad, 1976], vol. 2, 307, 308-309). Dostoevskii replied to Surazhevskaiia, but his letter is missing. Surazhevskaiia wrote a second letter, in which she apologized, having learned how difficult it was for Dostoevskii to reply to such letters as her former one (*Ibid.*, 318-319).

such as respect for the paternal will or the need to marry and have children, had to be subordinate to the Orthodox and Pan-Slavistic ideals for which the *Diary* intended to speak. Wishing to educate his female readers, to help them become gradually aware of the ethical problem that was hidden in women's issues and the repercussions that those issues could have for the fate of Russia, Dostoevskii felt it appropriate to maintain contact only with those readers in whom he had glimpsed a serious willingness to be guided. For this reason, he entertained correspondence with at least three of them (S. E. Lur'e from Minsk, A. F. Gerasimova from Kronshdtadt, and O. A. Antipova from St. Petersburg) between 1876 and 1877.<sup>115</sup> The epistolary relationship with these readers must have also partly inspired the writing of the last paragraph of the September 1877 issue of the *Diary of a Writer*, "An Intimation of the Future Educated Russian Man. The Certain Lot of the Future Russian Woman," in which Dostoevskii lays the foundation of that apologia of Russian women that would culminate in the exaltation of Pushkin's "humble" (*smirennaiia*) Tatiana in 1880.

The case of women correspondents thus confirms that the *Diary of a Writer* was in fact a kind of workshop, not only because it allowed its author to immerse himself in current events, to read up on news stories and reflect on the issues that he would later develop in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but also because it allowed him to get in touch with the tastes, problems, and interests of his audience: Dostoevskii then entered the 1880s ready to modulate his new novel on a type of reader whom he had by now begun to know.

#### 4. ON THE SUMMIT OF OLYMPUS. *THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV* AND THE SPEECH ON PUSHKIN

The success of *The Diary of a Writer* earned Dostoevskii a prominent position in the literary field and a series of prestigious awards. Affiliations with literary associations and charities,<sup>116</sup> participation in public events, invitations to the most exclusive literary salons of the time,<sup>117</sup> contacts with the

<sup>115</sup> On this correspondence see Vassena, *Reawakening National Identity*, 161-167.

<sup>116</sup> As a member of the Literary Fund, Dostoevskii had attended the social dinners organized by the Society for Financial Aid to Needy Writers and Scholars since the beginning of 1878 (see Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 378). In November 1880 Dostoevskii was given a gratuity from the Literary Fund. Another important achievement was, in 1878, his election as a member of the Slavic Benevolent Society and as associate member of the Division of Russian Language and Letters of the Imperial Academy of Sciences (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 11); then, in 1879, his election as a member of the honorary committee of the International Literary Association, founded by Victor Hugo. See Dostoevskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 30/1, 300).

<sup>117</sup> On Dostoevskii's attendance of exclusive literary salons see Tikhomirov, *Dostoevskii na Kuznechnom. Daty. Sobytiia. Liudi*, 73-110, 130-148.

high governmental circles:<sup>118</sup> the last three years of Dostoevskii's life were marked by a series of meaningful encounters, tokens of esteem, meetings with the crowds, in a crescendo of notoriety that contributed, on the one hand, to the serious deterioration of his physical condition but, on the other, to his conquest of a long-pursued state of economic well-being. This also resulted from his new novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, about which even before its publication people were making forecasts:

There, even in this moment, I am looking forward to the new Dostoevskii novel. In recent years, he has suffered from a kind of creative delirium; he writes in this way: first a success, then a failure, then a success again. Now it's the turn of a successful novel—let's hope this is one.<sup>119</sup>

The choice to publish with *Russkii vestnik* was carefully pondered by Dostoevskii, who feared he might be damaged by once again associating his name with a controversial and openly reactionary man like Katkov. In addition to the editor's cold answers about his fee, the proposals that Dostoevskii received from other journals also contributed to his increasing doubts.<sup>120</sup> In the end, however, the economic factor prevailed, and he succeeded in making Katkov agree to publish the book for a fee of 300 roubles per printer's sheet.<sup>121</sup>

On 1 February 1879, in the first issue of *Russkii vestnik*, the first two books of the first part of *The Brothers Karamazov* were published. The earliest testimonies of the reactions of the public come from a few days later: as early as on 8 February, the historian K. N. Bestuzhev-Riumin notes in his diary his positive impression about the figure of Zosima: "I have read [...]"

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<sup>118</sup> In March 1878, thanks to the mediation of Admiral D. S. Arsen'ev, former tutor to the Grand Dukes Sergei and Pavel, Dostoevskii was invited at least twice to the Winter Palace. In March 1879 he began to attend literary evenings in the Marble Palace as a guest of Grand Duke Konstantin Kontantinovich (cf. Tikhomirov, *Dostoevskii na Kuznechnom. Daty. Sobytiia. Liudi*, 110-130). In this period Dostoevskii also became closer to K. P. Pobedonostsev, whom he had met in 1872. As a member of the State Council and as the Ober-Procurator of the Most Holy Synod, Pobedonostsev played an important role in Dostoevskii's shift to reactionary positions in his late years. Cf. L. Grossman, "Dostoevskii i pravitel'stvennye krugi 1870-kh godov," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* (Moscow, 1934), vol. 15, 83-123. See also Tikhomirov, *Dostoevskii na Kuznechnom. Daty. Sobytiia. Liudi*, 98-105.

<sup>119</sup> Letter from Vs. Solov'ev to K. N. Leont'ev, 6 January 1879 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 476).

<sup>120</sup> See for example S. A. Iur'ev's proposal to publish Dostoevskii's new novel in the new Moscow journal *Russkaia дума* (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 50-52).

<sup>121</sup> See Dostoevskii's letter to A. G. Dostoevskaia of 22 June 1878 (*Ibid.*, 46). In fact, economic terms were only partially honored by *Russkii vestnik*. In his last letter, written on 26 January 1881, Dostoevskii submitted to N. A. Liubimov his request to pay 4000 roubles, as stated in the contract (*Ibid.*, 309).

*The Brothers Karamazov* (what a magnificent character the *starets* is!)”.<sup>122</sup> A month later, Dostoevskii himself writes with satisfaction about how the novel is producing a furor in St. Petersburg “in the palace, among the reading public, and at public readings,”<sup>123</sup> and a few days later he receives confirmation that the same is happening in Moscow<sup>124</sup> and in the provinces.<sup>125</sup>

The first opportunity for a public reading of the new novel presented itself on 9 March 1879. Sources report that more than six hundred spectators gathered in the Assembly of the Nobility Hall (*Zal Blagorodnogo Sobraniia*) in St. Petersburg, attracted by the illustrious names of the performers in the programme. The presence of Turgenev, triumphantly welcomed back on his return to Russia, led Dostoevskii to carefully weigh his selection: having stepped onto the stage after his rival, who had read the story “The Steward” (*Burmistr*), Dostoevskii read the chapters “The Confession of an Ardent Heart. In Verse” and “The Confession of an Ardent Heart. In Anecdotes” from the third book of the novel, which had only been published a few days earlier in the second issue of *Russkii vestnik*. In the beginning, Dostoevskii’s performance seemed to not to meet the expectations: “It started in a weak and boring way; there was talk of a real devilry, so that I involuntarily thought: here is the man... He points to a sort of apocalypse”.<sup>126</sup> Although it is not possible to establish precisely how Dostoevskii adapted the text, the testimonies of those who were present clearly indicate at what point the audience had to change their mind:

But when it came to Dmitrii Karamazov’s confession, everything suddenly changed. The public was petrified. The painful depth of the feeling of this burning heart was made by the author so credible and artistic... I had never heard anything like it. The way he read the prose, the verses ... the vibration of his vocal organ... that certain characteristic acceleration in the most dramatic passages... it was unbelievable.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Quoted from Institut Russkoi Literatury (Pushkinskii Dom), *Letopis’ zhizni i tvorchestva F. M. Dostoevskogo 1875-1881* (St. Petersburg, 1999), 301.

<sup>123</sup> See Dostoevskii’s letter to V. F. Putsykovich, 12 March 1879 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 75).

<sup>124</sup> See Putsykovich’s reply from Moscow: “Your novel is stirring here such a furor, as in Petersburg” (Letter of 14 March 1879, IRLI, f. 100, n. 29828).

<sup>125</sup> “Fedor Mikhailovch Dostoevskii’s new novel is read with great interest—I cannot meet my acquaintances’ requests to loan copies of *Russkii vestnik* from my library” (Letter from Kh. D. Alchevskaia to A. G. Dostoevskaia, March 1879, “Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov,” 478). See also the letter written on 10 December 1880 to Dostoevskii by A. F. Blagonravov, a doctor from Iur’ev-Polskii: “*The Brothers Karamazov* [...] is read by many even in our most remote province, even though under the guidance of people better able to understand your art” (“Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov,” 490).

<sup>126</sup> D. N. Sadovnikov, “Vstrechi s Turgenevym. ‘Piatnitsy’ u poeta Ia. P. Polonskogo v 1879 godu,” *Russkoe proshloe*, 1 (1923), 75.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* On 9 March evening see Volgin, *Poslednii god Dostoevskogo*, 91-99.

The extraordinarily fortunate choice of the passage from the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*—the confession of Dmitrii Karamazov to his younger brother Aleksei—which well reflects the particularities of the author's talent and style, and his inspired reading have made a strong impression. During one passage, even our public, usually cold and severe, did not resist and burst into applause.<sup>128</sup>

The dramatic tension of the scene, exacerbated by the decadent setting—the lonely, rotten and semi-destroyed kiosk, the green table with a half-empty cognac bottle—and Dmitrii's state of feverish exaltation was further stressed by the painful and “nervous” interpretation of Dostoevskii: “His nerves and those of the public, from the beginning of the reading, [...] gradually grow more tense, the voice of the author-reader seems to spring, with its painful intensity, from the most secret depths of his soul”.<sup>129</sup> The empathetic power exerted by the scene was such that there was someone who confessed to Dostoevskii they had experienced similar situations: it was the case of a woman who had witnessed the reading of 9 March and who, affected by the story of Katerina Ivanovna and her father, the colonel who had stolen a large sum of money from his regiment's register, wrote to Dostoevskii on 14 March, invoking help for a young man who had stolen from the treasury to support his poor sister.<sup>130</sup> Several people who had attended the *Brothers Karamazov* public readings also wrote similar letters. Their words show that the involvement they felt with the characters of the novel was of a piece with the exaltation that came to them from being in the presence of the writer. The emotional upheaval predominated over the exegetical act, as per this anonymous letter of 6 April 1879, which takes up the ‘logic of the heart’ already described by other readers:

Yesterday I came to the evening just to see you. In fact, I had never seen you before yesterday. Not just me, but many of us came only for this. And everyone is very happy with the love with which you were received. Simply with love, and in no other way. Even Turgenev was welcomed well, with honour, perhaps, with honour, in fact. But there was hardly any heart involved there. He speaks more to the intellect. They welcomed him with respect because one cannot do otherwise; he is a talent. You were instead welcomed with simplicity, love, sincerity, because your

128 *Golos*, 11 March 1879.

129 Letter from N. A. Solov'ev-Nesmelov to I. Z. Surikov, 21 March 1879, (“Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov,” 476). The same effect is reported in Kh. D. Alchevskaia's letter to A. G. Dostoevskaia of the end of March 1879 (Ibid., 478).

130 Letter from V. Bauer to Dostoevskii, 14 March 1879 (RGALI, f. 212, op. 1, d. 59).

talent is so simple, lovable, sincere. With you, one cannot do anything else but tell you everything one has in his heart [...]. Fedor Mikhailovich! Now you have written a new novel, everyone is reading it: in libraries it is impossible to find *Russkii vestnik*, they are literally fighting over it...<sup>131</sup>

With the public readings of the *Brothers Karamazov*, the crowd's emotional involvement in Dostoevskii almost took the form of religious devotion. Some testimonies, especially those of students, reveal the unstable potential of emotions and feelings that had by then become unmanageable for his readers—a prelude to that 'cult of Dostoevskii' that N. K. Mikhailovskii would stigmatize in 1882:

My dear, my darling, you must not read out aloud! If one could listen to you on one's knees, if one could give up one's soul for every ingenious word of yours, then you would be allowed to read; instead, think of what torment it is to listen to you, to feel a kind of pain out of the ecstasy, and to know that one does not have the strength, the ability to express what one feels. It's terrible, how much it hurts!<sup>132</sup>

The positive feedback received by his public readings convinced Dostoevskii to perform other chapters of the novel, some of which were as of yet unpublished. Between 1879 and 1880 his repertoire was enriched with "Women Who Have Faith," from the Second Book; some excerpts from the Fourth Book, "Lacerations"; "Rebellion" and "The Grand Inquisitor," from the Fifth Book; some excerpts from the Tenth Book, "Boys"; and finally, "Iliushechka's Funeral" from the Epilogue. In addition to the charity public readings, sources report people performing collective readings of *The Brothers Karamazov* even in private homes. Excerpts from the novel were read aloud in the residence of Grand Duke Konstantin Romanov<sup>133</sup> and in that of the magnate and art collector Pavel Tret'iakov,<sup>134</sup> but also during student meetings, where the readings were followed by heartfelt discussions about the possible developments of the plot:

<sup>131</sup> Letter to Dostoevskii signed "One of your readers and admirers," of 6 April 1879 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 478-479).

<sup>132</sup> Unsigned letter to Dostoevskii, 6 April 1879 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 479). On the controversial "cult of Dostoevskii" among Russian students in 1880s see O. N. Ansberg, "K istorii vospriiatiia tvorchestva F. M. Dostoevskogo studencheskoi molodezh'iu 1880-kh gg.," *Knizhnoe delo v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX-nachale XX v.* (Moscow, 1990), vol. 5, 33-40.

<sup>133</sup> I. S. Zil'bershtein, "Novonaidennye i zabytye pis'ma Dostoevskogo," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 86, 136-138.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

In the days when the new issue of *Russkii vestnik* was published, with Dostoevskii's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, there were neither songs nor laughter. When we got together, we all sat around the table under the big green lamp, and began reading aloud. We all read, in turn, without moving away until the last page. Faces paled and burnt with excitement, the reader's voice trembled with agitation. When the reading ended, we talked about nothing more than what had been read, we analysed every movement of the soul of the characters, we made assumptions about the subsequent developments of the novel.<sup>135</sup>

Evenings like the one described by Lebedeva could turn into real battles, in which each of the participants, shouting and crying, defended their interpretation of the episodes read, supporting their positions with meticulous analyses of the characters' psychology. In her 1908 memoirs, recalling with what fear she had finally resolved to write to Dostoevskii to ask him to solve her age-old doubt about the identity of Karamazov's murderer, Lebedeva compares two different ways of relating to the figure of the literary author. If in 1908 anyone could argue with Tolstoi through the pages of a newspaper (See VASSENA, "Reading the News on Tolstoy in 1908," in the present volume), in 1880 writing to Dostoevskii was still considered a bold gesture, justifiable only by the extreme gravity of a situation which, in this case, stemmed from the reader's total identification with his fictional characters:

My interest was so strong that it was not possible for me to wait for a whole month for the next issue of *Russkii vestnik*. Now everything seems possible and accessible: gymnasium students do not hesitate to publicly debate with Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi on a newspaper; in a superficial article they would irreverently refute a conception elaborated in the course of a lifetime. In my day, reaching the decision to directly address the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* to solve a nagging doubt was not so easy. We considered our favourite writers as masters, their authority was for us like a beam of light. I only justified my courage in writing to Dostoevskii by the torment that haunted me and that had obscured all other interests in my life, with the torment of not being able to decide who had killed Karamazov: Dmitrii, or Smerdiakov?<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> E. N. Lebedeva, "Kak prezhde chitali knigi. Stranichka vospominanii," *Vsemirnyi vestnik*, 10 (1908), 7.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9. Dostoevskii replied to Lebedeva on November 8, 1879.



With the passing of months, interest in the new novel grew, as Dostoevskii himself reports to N. A. Liubimov in a letter dated 8 December 1879: “The novel is being read everywhere, people write me letters, it’s being read by young people, it’s being read in high society, it’s being criticized or praised in the press, and never before, with regard to the impression produced all around, have I had such a success”.<sup>137</sup> The interest aroused by the novel is reflected in over sixty reviews that appeared between the beginning of 1879 and the end of 1880, but also in the appeal that it exercised in other scientific fields, such as psychiatry and jurisprudence.<sup>138</sup> Its success, however, was not unanimous: if some readers drew pleasure from “shedding tears over a work of art”<sup>139</sup> or from attempting a “psychological analysis”<sup>140</sup> of the characters, or other experienced, at least momentarily, fascination at the prophetic visions of a future universal brotherhood scattered throughout the novel,<sup>141</sup> others found the Dostoevskian style excessive. For example, Lev Tolstoi expressed himself several times on the “non-artistry” (*nekhudozhestvennost’*)

<sup>137</sup> Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 168. Dostoevskii held in such high regard the opinions of the people he met, even of the strangers who came to his door to discuss his new novel, that he attributed precisely to these ‘distractions’ his delays in delivering the instalments to *Russkii vestnik*: “I have been unable to get anything written now for the May issue because I am literally prevented from writing here, and I need to flee Petersburg as soon as possible. The Karamazovs are again to blame for that. So many people come to see me every day apropos of them, so many people seek to make my acquaintance, invite me to their homes—that I’m absolutely at my wit’s end and am now fleeing Petersburg!” (Dostoevskii’s letter to N. Liubimov, 29 April 1880. Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 193-194).

<sup>138</sup> See for example the study of psychopathologist V. F. Chizh, who compared Dostoevskii’s last novel to a handbook of psychiatric medicine (V. F. Chizh, *Dostoevskii kak psikhopatolog* (Moscow, 1885). As for the juridical field, it is worth mentioning the speech “Dostoevskii as a criminologist” given by A. F. Koni at a meeting of the St. Petersburg University Juridical Society the day after Dostoevskii’s funeral. In his study on the serialization of *The Brothers Karamazov* in *Russkii vestnik*, William Mills Todd III notices how each instalment ‘dialogued’ with the non-artistic contents of the journal, thus favoring a trans-discursive approach to the issues reflected in the novel. See W. M. Todd III, “*Brat’ia Karamazovy i poetika serializatsii*,” *Russkaia literatura*, 4 (1992), 36-37.

<sup>139</sup> “This thing left me in such a turmoil, at night I could not sleep and shed warm tears; but this is a pleasure, to shed tears over a work of art” (undated letter from E. F. Lunge to S. I. Tolstaia, in “Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov,” 497). In a letter to his wife dated 30-31 May 1880, Dostoevskii reported: “... He [Viskovatov] told me that Saburov (the Minister of Education), a relative of his, read certain passages of *The Karamazovs* while literally weeping from ecstasy” (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 219). Andrei Aleksandrovich Saburov (1838-1916) was the Minister of Public Education from 1880 to 1889.

<sup>140</sup> In June 1880 P. M. Tret’iakov’s wife wrote in her diary: “In this period I have read *Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevskii and together with Pasha I have enjoyed the psychological analysis, feeling how everything in the soul stirs, and turns over what is good and mean in it. Thanks to *Brothers Karamazov*, it is possible to change and to improve oneself” (Zil’bershtein, “Novonaidennye i zabytye pis’ma Dostoevskogo,” 127).

<sup>141</sup> Thus the writer L. I. Veselitskaia describes how she was subjugated by Alesha’s vision of the coming of the Kingdom of Heaven in the first book of the novel: “When will it come? ... And will it really come? And, imbued with Dostoevskii’s passionate faith, I also thought: “It will come, it will come, it will come soon. It’s at the door, it’s near.” V. Mikulich (L. I. Veselitskaia), *Vstrecha s znamenitost’iu* (Moscow, 1903), 11-12.

of *The Brothers Karamazov*,<sup>142</sup> while in May 1879 Petr Chaikovskii wrote to his brother: “I have read the continuation of *The Brothers Karamazov* in the new issue of *Russkii vestnik*. It is becoming unbearable. All the characters, from the first to the last, are crazy. In general, Dostoevskii can only hold up for a part of the novel. Then it becomes chaos”.<sup>143</sup> Similar opinions were expressed by educated readers and university students close to the radical-democratic circles.<sup>144</sup> Despite this, even those who did not love Dostoevskii could not remain indifferent. That same Kitaev who had not been able to finish *The Idiot* and *The Raw Youth*, confessed to a correspondent that he had resolved to read Dostoevskii’s latest work, notwithstanding his scepticism, if only to be able to *discuss* it:

As far as I can judge from the extracts of Dostoevskii’s novel published in the press, *The Brothers Karamazov* does not attract me even a little and, if I ever read it, I would do it not for the pleasure I could draw from it but simply out of curiosity. I might as well read the last words of a dwindling writer. Forgive me if I express myself in such a hard way and if I am so cold about what you are passionate about; all my reflections go absolutely beyond what you say, indeed I even suppose that, all things considered, I will have to read *Karamazov* in order to talk about Dostoevskii in a more detailed and specific way ...<sup>145</sup>

This climate of general fervour for *The Brothers Karamazov* certainly influenced the reception of the speech on Pushkin pronounced by Dostoevskii on 8 June 1880, on the occasion of the Moscow celebrations for the inauguration of the monument to Pushkin. The authority with which Dostoevskii felt vested gave him unprecedented confidence: his anxiety about the public’s reaction, which had characterized the release of his previous works, gave way to the awareness of finally being able to express his most radical convictions. Hence the absence of hesitation that characterized the preparation of the *Speech*: in the letters written to his wife between May and June 1880, Dostoevskii insists on the need to greatly impact his audience with his speech, and calls it his “main debut,” the crowning of his career; his letters from this period are studded with military expressions, which leads us

<sup>142</sup> See D. P. Makovitskii, “Iasnopolianskie zapiski,” *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 90 (Moscow, 1979), part 4, 380, 385, 386, 388.

<sup>143</sup> P. I. Chaikovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1963), vol. 8, 226.

<sup>144</sup> Cf. A. V. Blium, “Chitatel’skie nastroiia i vkusy peterburgskogo studentchestva kontsa 70-kh godov XIX veka (po materialam novonajdennykh dokumentov chital’ni peterburgskogo universiteta),” *Knizhnoe delo Peterburga – Petrograda – Leningrada* (Leningrad, 1981), 146-161.

<sup>145</sup> Letter from F. N. Kitaev to E. S. Nekrasova, 21 November 1879 (“Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov,” 491-492).

to assume he thought he was approaching some hard fight against masses of opponents.<sup>146</sup>

The extraordinary event that this speech represented was recognized, at least at the beginning, unanimously: acclaimed by the crowd as a revelator of the prophetic meaning of Pushkin's work, Dostoevskii in turn earned himself the title of "prophet."<sup>147</sup> Nonetheless, after the first "hypnotic" moment, critics began to attack the writer harshly, accusing him of having manipulated the emotions of the public to inculcate his fanatical ideas on the role of Russia in the fate of the world.<sup>148</sup> The public's interest in Dostoevskii's figure grew exponentially, perhaps due to the heated debate in the press: between June 1880 and January 1881, A. G. Dostoevskaiia recorded in her notebooks over two thousand addresses of subscribers to the last two issues of *The Diary of a Writer*. The *Diary* issue that contained the full text of his *Speech on Pushkin* was snapped up, and they were forced to publish a second edition in 2,000 copies: "It is flying off the shelves. He printed four thousand copies and they sold out in one week. It is an unprecedented success in the field of publishing."<sup>149</sup> Dostoevskii's newly achieved notoriety also influenced the editorial fate of *The Brothers Karamazov*: while for his previous novels, the search for a publisher in book form had caused Dostoevskii a lot of trouble, this time the proposals from the publishers started to flow in even before the last of the instalments was out.<sup>150</sup> In any case, the first edition in book form was published at the end of 1880 by Dostoevskaiia, who had by then become a skilled entrepreneur and the guardian of her husband's interests: the edition was printed in five thousand copies, half of which sold out in a few days.<sup>151</sup> The opening of the Dostoevskii book storage on 1 January 1880, intended only for readers residing outside of Petersburg, caused a surge in sales, with orders coming every day from every part of Russia.<sup>152</sup> However, with Dostoevskii's sudden death, on 28 January 1881, new priorities took

146 See his letter to K. P. Pobedonostsev of 19 May 1880 and his letter to his wife of 5 June 1880 (Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 5, 200, 231).

147 On Dostoevskii's speech in the context of the Pushkin celebration see M. C. Levitt, *Russian Literary Politics and the Pushkin Celebration of 1880* (Ithaca, London, 1989), 122-146.

148 The term "hypnosis" to describe the effect of Dostoevskii's speech was used by A. G. Dostoevskaiia (Dostoevskaiia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 416). The same word appears in the text of S. A. Vengerov's speech "Stat' nastoiashchim russkim—znachit stat' bratom vsekh liudei," in S. A. Vengerov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg, 1913), vol. 4, 29.

149 N. V. Shelgunov, "Vospominaniia," in N. V. Shelgunov, L. P. Shelgunova, M. L. Mikhailov, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1967), vol. 1, 369. See also Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 502.

150 The first proposal was made by P. E. Kekhrbardzhi, who in 1876 had published the book edition of *The Raw Youth* (*Letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva F. M. Dostoevskogo 1875-1881*, 331).

151 Dostoevskaiia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 419. Strakhov talks about 4,000 copies (Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 504).

152 See the memoirs of the office boy P.G. Kuznetsov "Na sluzhbe u Dostoevskogo," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 86, 332-336.

over: having closed down the book storage, Dostoevskaia began to devote herself to the complete edition of her husband's works.

##### 5. POST MORTEM: THE FIRST ATTEMPTS TO POPULARIZE DOSTOEVSKII'S WORK

Thousands of people, including many students, took part in the funeral procession that accompanied Dostoevskii's coffin on 31 January 1881, giving rise to a spectacle hardly ever seen in Petersburg: a stream of people that wound along the streets of the city, choirs, commemorative speeches, banners and crowns of flowers, all immortalized in several memoirs.<sup>153</sup> The transformation of Dostoevskii into a "star"<sup>154</sup> of the literary firmament was now complete: hundreds sent offers to erect his funeral monument, and in the following weeks alone more than two hundred obituaries, memoirs, articles and poems about the illustrious deceased were published. On the one hand, as Leonid Grossman observed,<sup>155</sup> the Tsarist government played a fundamental role in the process of Dostoevskii's canonisation by endeavouring, immediately after his death, to honour the 'patriot' writer; on the other, the demonstrations of affection that the public had already paid to Dostoevskii in previous years prove that his popularity cannot be dismissed only as the result of a political strategy. It was rather the result of the interaction between different literary and social institutions and their respective interpretations of the meaning of Dostoevskii's work.

The mass psychosis caused by Dostoevskii's death had deep repercussions for the publishing market, which recorded a significant increase in the sales of his works. Thus the journalist A. S. Suvorin recalls those days: "The turmoil in Petersburg was extraordinary. [...] The public ran to read and buy Dostoevskii. As if death had revealed him, and he had not existed before."<sup>156</sup> The interest of the public did not go unnoticed by Dostoevskaia, who immediately reprinted the single editions of her husband's works and, a few months later, set about realizing what she felt to be her own "duty"<sup>157</sup>: publishing the complete collection of his works. Having declined other

<sup>153</sup> See Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 433-441; I. L. Kuz'mina, "Peterburg ne vidal nichego podobnogo," in *Dostoevskii i ego vremia* (Leningrad, 1971), 305-307.

<sup>154</sup> For a discussion of the meaning of "star" in this context see B. Dubin, "Klassik – zvezda – modnoe imia – kul'tovaia figura: o strategiakh legitimizatsii kul'turnogo avtoriteta," *Sinii divan*, 8 (2006).

<sup>155</sup> L. Grossman, "Dostoevskii i pravitel'svennye krugi 1870-kh godov," *Literaturnoe nasledstvo*, vol. 15 (Moscow, 1934) 118.

<sup>156</sup> A. S. Suvorin, *Dnevnik* (London – Moscow, 2000), 351. A significant example of the effects of so much clamour on the collective psyche is represented by A. S. Suvorin's volume itself, in which the journalist recounts the hallucination he witnessed from reading *Brothers Karamazov*, from Dostoevskii's funeral, and from his vision of his funerary portrait made by V. S. Kriukov. A. S. Suvorin, *Ten' Dostoevskogo* (St. Petersburg, 1895).

<sup>157</sup> Letter from A. G. Dostoevskaia to E. F. Iunge, 14 August 1881 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 558).

publishers' offers to purchase the rights to Dostoevskii's writings, the widow obtained a line of credit from V. M. Tuganov, head of the "A.I. Vargunin" trading house, and she set out to work. The fourteen tomes of the first edition of the *Complete collection* of Dostoevskii's works were printed in the printing houses of brothers Panteleev and Aleksei Suvorin between 1882 and 1883, with a circulation of 6,200 copies, and offered for sale at the cost of 25 roubles (1 rouble and 78 kopecks per tome), with the possibility of paying in instalments. The success of the project exceeded all expectations, yielding Dostoevskaia two thousand subscribers and a profit of 75,000 roubles.<sup>158</sup> Although it is not easy to outline a profile of the average reader of Dostoevskaia's edition, it is possible to make some assumptions based on the information in our possession. Even if it was possible to pay in instalments, the high cost made the collection accessible only to a limited range of readers. Furthermore, in order to advertise the work, Dostoevskaia decided to resort not to announcements in newspapers, but rather to leaflets which she printed for that purpose and then sent to specific recipients, so that they would arrive "precisely in the hands of those who read and buy books (gymnasiums and colleges), or in the office of any institution where many people converge."<sup>159</sup> The preliminary selection of the subscribers suggests that, at the beginning of the 1880s, the circulation of Dostoevskii's works had not undergone any substantial changes: it mainly involved (in addition to the higher classes) students and officials, and did not reach readers from the lower social classes. Nevertheless, the figures relating to the subsequent five editions of the complete collections published by Dostoevskii's widow attest to her effort to widen that circle of readers: the second edition (1885), in 6 volumes, was printed in 6,200 copies (in a large two-column format) and sold at 15 roubles (20 with shipping); it sold out in two years. The third edition (1888-1889), in 12 volumes, was printed with a circulation of 12,200 copies; sold at 10 roubles, 12 with shipping, it sold out in two and a half years; the fourth edition (1888-1891), in 12 volumes, was printed with a circulation of 12,200 copies; the sixth (jubilee) edition (1904-1906), in 14 volumes, was printed on tissue paper, included an appendix with thirty unpublished new portraits of Dostoevskii's and his relatives', and was distributed in 3,200 copies, at the cost of 25 roubles, with the possibility of purchasing it in instalments by paying two roubles a month; at the same time Dostoevskaia released the seventh edition (1904-1906) in 12 volumes, which was printed with a circulation of 3,200 copies, and put on sale at the cost of 10 roubles, 12 with shipping.<sup>160</sup> Dostoevskaia's efforts were largely

<sup>158</sup> Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 485-486. See also A. G. Dostoevskaia's letter to S. A. Tolstaia, 1 October 1885 (T. Nikiforova, "Pis'ma A. G. Dostoevskoi k S. A. Tolstoi," *Mir filologii* (Moscow, 2000), 295.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>160</sup> Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 489, 574-575; Andrianova, *Anna Dostoevskaia: prizvanie i priznaniia*, 36.

rewarded, in terms of both economic gain and literary reputation: according to a study conducted by Nikolai Rubakin (1862-1946), one of the leading pre-revolutionary researchers of popular reading, in nine libraries in the Russian provinces, Dostoevskii was among the ten most read authors in the 1891-1892 period.<sup>161</sup> However, after the fourth edition of the *Complete collection* of Dostoevskii's works (1888-1891), Dostoevskii's publishing activity suffered a setback, and in 1894-1895 the fifth edition of the *Complete works* of Dostoevskii came out in the form of monthly supplements to the illustrated weekly *Niva* (*The Field*).

The encyclopaedic and popular character of Russia's illustrated magazines at the end of the century met the tastes of semi-educated readers, for whom thick journals represented an overly complex text (See REITBLAT, "The Reading Audience of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," in the present volume): small and medium-level clerks, priests from rural parishes, merchants, low-ranking soldiers, elementary schoolteachers learned the latest news in science, fashion, art, and literature in a language accessible to them—and in an attractive form, in which the iconographic component had a fundamental role. In order to increase their number of readers, beginning from the 1870s, the publishers of illustrated magazines had begun to include promotional items or 'free gifts,' usually oleographs, which were widely publicized almost to the point of obscuring the contents of the magazine itself. In the 1880s, the oleographs were gradually replaced by books; precisely this new form of free gifts, thanks to the high circulation and low cost of the magazines, became an important channel for the dissemination of literature among the less educated classes.<sup>162</sup> The editor of *Niva*, Adolf F. Marks, was one of the first to focus on free gifts, not only to enrich the magazine's content, but also to expand the reader's quota and to challenge the competition. From the beginning, *Niva* had been addressing 'average' readers with less refined tastes than those of its main competitor, the magazine *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia* (*World Illustration*) (which also differed in the price: 6 roubles for an annual subscription to *Niva*, 12 for *Vsemirnaia illiustratsiia*), but with more education than the public of other thin illustrated magazines, such as *Rodina* (*The Homeland*).<sup>163</sup> The idea of free gifts proved to be successful: within two decades, between 1870 and 1891, the circulation of *Niva* increased tenfold, from nine thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand copies, and its subscribers started to include both representatives of the provincial intelligentsia and (in smaller quanti-

161 N. A. Rubakin, *Etiudy o russkoi chitaiushchei publike* (St. Petersburg, 1895), 127.

162 On illustrated magazines see Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 101-112; J. Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read. Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton, 1985), 111-117.

163 Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 103. On *Niva* reading public see E. A. Dinershtein, "Fabrikant" *chitatelei* A. F. Marks (Moscow, 1986), 42-45. According to Rubakin, *Niva* circulated "in considerable quantities among the clergy, the clerical world and other public officials only in the provinces" (Rubakin, *Etiudy*, 17).

ties) workers and educated farmers. Marks's next step was, in 1890, to seek and obtain from the Central Department of the Press (Glavnoe upravlenie po delam pechati) first to publish monthly supplements, and then to double them; these were no longer just oleographs but also books, increased from twelve to twenty-four a year.<sup>164</sup> Starting from 1891, Marks took to publishing one or two economic editions of the complete works of classic authors, which were either given away as free supplements to *Niva* or sold separately.

Marks's initiative turned out to be an unprecedented publishing success, especially relevant in the spread of classics among the "large public with a low budget,"<sup>165</sup> those who could not afford the expensive books of other publishers. Within a decade, the personal libraries of subscribers to *Niva* were enriched by the complete collections of the majority of the most famous writers:

Nothing to say about *Niva*—there was probably no corner in Russia where they did not subscribe to it, waiting impatiently for each issue, but not for the magazine itself (it was almost always quite boring and monotonous) but rather for the free books, and these books bore names such as Mel'nikov-Pecherskii, Dostoevskii, Leskov, Gleb Uspenskii, Korolenko, Mamin-Sibirskii, Rostand, Bunin, Kuprin, Fet, Maikov, Molière, Hamsun, Ibsen, Hauptmann, Garshin, Leonid Andreev...<sup>166</sup>

Thanks to the publication of the complete collections of works in the form of free books, in 1904 the circulation of *Niva* reached about 275,000 copies.<sup>167</sup> After the complete collections of the works of Lermontov, Lomonosov, Fonvizin, and others, Marks's choice fell on Dostoevskii: on 15 April 1893, at the end of a confidential negotiation, he purchased from A. G. Dostoevskaia, for 75,000 roubles and for three years only, the copyrights to all the novels and the stories, as well as all the articles and the editions of the *Diary of a Writer of 1876-1877*.<sup>168</sup> As Dostoevskaia remembers, she accepted Marks's proposal because she hoped the works released as free books via *Niva* would in this way also reach the readers from the lower classes, who could not afford to purchase her editions, but who would have no problems paying five roubles for an annual subscription to *Niva*.<sup>169</sup> That being said, once the deal was made, Marks—who had also hoped to increase the num-

<sup>164</sup> Dinershtein, "Fabrikant" chitatelei, 38.

<sup>165</sup> V. Avseenko, "Kruzhek belletristov Nivy v 70-kh godakh," *Niva*, 50 (1904), 1006.

<sup>166</sup> L. I. Borisov, *Roditeli, nastavniki, poety... Kniga v moei zhizni* (Moscow, 1967), 40.

<sup>167</sup> Dinershtein, "Fabrikant" chitatelei, 40.

<sup>168</sup> On the negotiations between Marks and Dostoevskaia see Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 541-554; Dinershtein, "Fabrikant" chitatelei, 112-117.

<sup>169</sup> Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 543. Dostoevskaia's considerations were not groundless: Rubakin attributes the low diffusion of books to their excessive cost (Rubakin, *Etiudy*, 24).



ber of subscribers to his magazine via this deal—was assailed by the fear that the public would not respond as he hoped. However, time dispelled his doubts and proved the worth of the enterprise, which happened to be far more profitable for Marks than for Dostoevskaia. The *Complete collection* of Dostoevskii's works earned *Niva* fifty thousand more subscribers, which meant that, in one year only, between 1893 and 1894, its circulation increased from 120,000 to 170,000 copies, with a consequent additional profit of 250,000 roubles.<sup>170</sup>

If public library reports in different regions of Russia confirm Dostoevskii's consistent presence among the ten most requested authors in the years 1896-1898,<sup>171</sup> this was probably at least partially due to representatives of the lower-middle class entering into his readership. But this is not the whole story. In forging the agreement, Marks and Dostoevskaia had taken for granted that *Niva's* novice readers would soon forget about the free books after their enthusiasm for them waned, leaving them to gather dust on the shelves of their homes. Furthermore, the widow was counting on publishing a more expensive luxury edition of her husband's complete works within a few years. However, contrary to expectations, subscribers to *Niva* turned out to know better, and the antiquarian booksellers took advantage of the situation, buying the free books at a ridiculously low price and reselling them at a higher price:

Many institutions (restaurants, hotels, etc.) that offered the illustrated magazine to their customers kept the free books. This came to the knowledge of antiquarian booksellers, who began to buy this edition at a low price and to resell it at a higher price. When it became known that *Niva's* free books had this value, private individuals also began to sell them. At the beginning, the trade of the *Complete works* of F. M. Dostoevskii was not particularly active, and the twenty-four tomes were sold at a cost comprised between 4 and 5 roubles. Then the price increased and reached 10 to 12 roubles per full set. In this way, little by little, the book market was filled with *Niva* edition of Dostoevskii's works, and this lasted about ten years, instead of the three-four years that we imagined.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Dinershtein, "Fabrikant" chitatelei, 113.

<sup>171</sup> Reitblat, *Ot Bovy k Bal'montu*, 80-81; P. Astaf'ev, "Chitaiushchaia publika v provintsii," *Zhizn'*, 18 (1898), 331.

<sup>172</sup> Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 543-544. Dostoevskaia took advantage of this time to dedicate herself to two major projects: the creation of the first bibliography of Dostoevskii's works and the foundation of the Dostoevskii Museum. See I. S. Andrianova, "Muzei pamiati F. M. Dostoevskogo": istoriia i perspektivy proekta (Petrozavodsk, 2013).



Only in 1904 did Dostoevskaia succeed in publishing a new luxury edition, in fourteen volumes, of the *Complete works*, setting its price at 25 roubles. Nevertheless, the last two editions of the *Complete works* were less successful than the previous ones:<sup>173</sup> this (in addition to the revolutionary ferments of the period, the consequent fear of thefts and fires, as well as the increase in price of printing work), convinced Dostoevskaia to cease her publishing activity and to sell the literary rights to N. S. Tsetlin, owner of the “Prosveshchenie” publishing company.

In retrospect, it seems reasonable to suppose that the saturation of the book market caused by the Marks edition should also be counted among the reasons for the lack of success of Dostoevskaia’s last two editions. Contemporaries’ memoirs testify that *Niva*’s free books were the main if not the only means of spreading the classics among the readers from the provinces and, in general, among the lower-middle class: “The provinces read the classics only thanks to the publisher A. F. Marks, when they began to be given away with *Niva* as free gifts.”<sup>174</sup> In some cases, this circumstance was to be expected, but it also proved serendipitous: sometimes the reader was attracted to the book’s low price rather than its content, and only afterwards did he become aware of the value of what he had begun to read. However, the fortunate cases in which the reader really got to understand the work in depth were rare. Some testimonies dating back to the early twentieth century show that readers from the lower social classes, or simply only partially educated readers lacking adequate exegetical tools, struggled to navigate not only the complex moral, social and philosophical issues of Dostoevskii’s novels, but also the prolixity and non-linearity of his style, to say nothing of the large cast of characters that crowd his stories. Working class readers, especially those residing in the cities, read a wide variety of works, and unlike peasant readers (who will be discussed later) did not seek religious precepts in secular literature, but simply morality that was applicable to life.<sup>175</sup> Hence the need for the adventures of novels’ heroes, explored with clarity and narrated in a linear manner. In 1902, a student at the Sunday school for Moscow workers, I. Iakovlev, wrote about *Crime and Punishment*: “I have read [...] *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoevskii’s novel, but I did not like this book because I had never read anything like it before.”<sup>176</sup> Similarly, another student at the same school, Avakin, wrote that he had already read Zhukovskii, Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol’, Turgenev, Tolstoi and others, but

<sup>173</sup> Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 575-578.

<sup>174</sup> N. V. Kuz’min, *Krug tsaria Solomona* (Moscow, 1966), 195-196.

<sup>175</sup> Brooks, “Readers and Reading at the End of the Tsarist Era,” 141-142. For a description of the Russian worker-readers in the early 20th century see L. M. Kleinbort, *Ocherki rabochei intelligentsii* (Petrograd, 1923), vol. 1, 42-64.

<sup>176</sup> “Chitatel’skie avtobiografii uchashchikhsia voskresnykh kursov dlia rabochikh,” in A. I. Reitblat (ed.), *Kniga i chitatel’ 1900-1917. Vospominaniia i dnevniki sovremennikov* (Moscow, 1999), 33.

that he found reading Dostoevskii particularly difficult. Not only limited reading skills, but also limited time available for reading, made it difficult for a worker to understand Dostoevskii's works:

The teacher did not deny us the books, but for some reason I was ashamed to ask him to explain to me the passages that I found most obscure in the books, especially Dostoevskii's. One reads in this way, without thinking any more about what he has read, and, in the end, nothing is left in one's head but a series of titles of works and names of characters which do not mean anything....<sup>177</sup>

In some cases, the increase in the number of books that were being read did not correspond to readers' greater ability to truly penetrate their contents: in the absence of an appropriate paratext, the new readers were struggling to understand Dostoevskii.<sup>178</sup> The efforts of the Russian pedagogues and publishers of the 1880s and 1890s, who attempted to adapt Dostoevskii's works to those categories of readers who until then had not had access to them, were aimed to overcome this very difficulty.

## 6. CONQUERING NEW AUDIENCES: THE CASE OF NOTES FROM THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD

After Dostoevskii's death, his reputation as a 'pedagogue' and 'friend of children,' which he had developed thanks to the social commitments that had characterized his last years, reached its apogee. Although direct testimonies of Dostoevskii being read at a young age are limited, there are signs of his growing popularity among schoolchildren in the 1880s and 1890s (See LEIBOV, VDOVIN, "What and How Russian Students Read in Schools, 1840-1917," in the present volume), which is also reflected in the lively publishing production for children that started immediately after his death. In 1881, the commission of the School Section of the Muscovite Society for the Dissemination of Technical Knowledge (*Moskovskoe obshchestvo rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znanii*), chaired by V. Ia. Stoiunin, included some of Dostoevskii's titles in the *Bibliograficheskii listok* (*Bibliography Sheet*), which represented an attempt at creating a bibliographic catalogue

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>178</sup> The report by the official from the Ministry of Popular Education P. A. Annin, read on 27 March 1898, referred precisely to the need for an apparatus of notes, and criticized the inclusion of Dostoevskii's works in the list of books recommended for popular reading. See I. L. Volgin, "Dostoevskii i pravitel'stvennaia politika v oblasti prosveshcheniia 1881-1917," *Dostoevskii. Materialy i issledovaniia* (Leningrad, 1980), vol. 4, 199.

for the development of children's literature.<sup>179</sup> The repertoire also included an article by the Kharkiv pedagogue Kh. D. Alchevskaia, who remarked on the lack of talented authors of children's literature in Russia and called for the publication of fragments of Dostoevskii's works, especially the short story "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party" ("Mal'chik u Khrista na elke") and extracts from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in editions dedicated to young readers. While admitting the need to modify or eliminate some passages of these texts, Alchevskaia claimed that the figure of the child who froze on Christmas Eve and the story of little Iliusha, abused by his school friends, would trigger a critical reaction rather than imitation, inspiring in young readers feelings of compassion and mercy toward the weakest. Alchevskaia expressed the belief that the love and compassion with which Dostoevskii had looked at the world of children would make his works understandable even to younger readers:

Dostoevskii loved children too much, he was too much an advocate of children, not to be accessible to a child's heart and understanding [...] No one can deny the beneficial influence that the great writer-psychologist had on our society; he taught us to be patient and sympathize, where previously we knew only contempt and revenge. And if he was able to transfuse into us his sympathy for the humiliated and the insulted, even more so can this sympathy be transfused into the docile soul of the child.<sup>180</sup>

The *Bibliography Sheet* and Alchevskaia's *peroratio* gave publishers a valid reason to broaden the quota of Dostoevskii readers to include younger age groups. Starting from this moment, some of his works began to be published in book form, as well as in anthologies and magazines for children and adolescents, arousing a heated debate between supporters and opponents of this educational 'revisiting' of Dostoevskii. At the same time,

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<sup>179</sup> *Bibliograficheskii listok. Trudy komissii pri Uchebnom otdel Mosk. Obshchestva rasprostraneniia tekhnicheskikh znani, po sostavleniiu kriticheskogo kataloga knig i statei dlia detskogo chteniia* (Moscow, 1881), vol. 1. On the activity of the Muscovite Society for the Dissemination of Technical Knowledge see J. Bradley, "Voluntary Associations, Civic Culture and Obshchestvennost' in Moscow," in E. W. Clowes, S. D. Kassow, J. L. West (eds.), *Between the Tsar and the People. Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton, 1991), 131-148. Opened in 1871, its School Section was tasked with solving questions related to the teaching of technical subjects and facing more general educational problems. (Leikina-Svirskaiia, *Intelligentsiia v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XIX veka*, 261). The *Bibliography Sheet* mentioned the following fragments from Dostoevskii's works: from *The Brothers Karamazov* – "O sviashchennomu pisaniu v zhizni ottsa Zosimy" and "U Iliushinoi posteli," *Semeinye vechera*, 2 (1881); from *Netochka Nezvanova* – "Netochka i Katia," *Vospitanie i obuchenie*, 3 (1881); from *Crime and Punishment* – "Razdavili! Cheloveka razdavili!," *Domashnee chtenie*, 4 (1870); "The Boy at Christ's Christmas Party," reprinted in Avenarius's *Tridtsat' lushchikh novykh skazok*, 1877 (*Bibliograficheskii listok*, 35).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

Dostoevskii's works began to attract the attention of the new publishing houses for the masses: the negotiations between the "Posrednik" publisher and Dostoevskaiia for the publication of a fragment of *The Brothers Karamazov* entitled "The Elder Zosima's Story" ("Rasskaz startsa Zosimy") date back to 1886; the project was then stopped by the censors.<sup>181</sup> The year after, the publisher Ivan Sytin planned to give away Dostoevskii's story "The Peasant Marey" ("Muzhik Marei") as a free supplement to his *Universal Calendar for 1887* (*Vseobshchii Kalendar' na 1887*), oriented to what he called "the embryo of the Russian reader," for whom "the calendar is the first and the last book," and who "in the calendar looks for an answer to all the questions arising in his awakening brains."<sup>182</sup> However, even in this case the project was not successful due to the veto of the censors.<sup>183</sup> Also worthy of mention are A. S. Suvorin's economic editions, which made an important contribution to the process of putting Dostoevskii's work before "the large public with a low budget": after printing several pocket-sized editions of Dostoevskii's works aimed at younger readers,<sup>184</sup> in 1887 Suvorin published *Poor Folk* in his famous "Cheap Library" (*Deshevaia biblioteka*) series.<sup>185</sup>

The attempts to launch Dostoevskii as a "children's writer" and as a "people's writer" on the market must be considered in the light of Russia's socio-cultural context in the late nineteenth century, a time in which educated Russians (especially those coming from the lower classes) grew increasingly aware of their mission to educate the masses, which was naturally accompanied by increasing attention to pedagogical practices.<sup>186</sup> Attempts to adapt

181 The volume did not receive the approval of the censorship because of its "mystical-social precepts in conflict with the spiritual precepts of the Orthodox faith and Church and with the current order of the government and society." See "Otryvok iz romana *Brat'ia Karamazovy* pered sudom tsenzury," publ. V. K. Lebedeva, *Russkaia literatura*, 2 (1970), 124. See also V. G. Chertkov's 10 December 1886 letter to L. N. Tolstoi in L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 90 vols. (Moscow, 1928-1958), vol. 85, 405, 423.

182 I. D. Sytin, *Zhizn' dlia knigi* (Moscow, 1962), 68, 69.

183 "Although free books pursue philanthropic objectives, they try to obtain them by indulging in details on the corruption of power, of the government, on the deprivations and sufferings of workers, peasants and members of the lower class" (quoted in E. A. Dinershtein, *Ivan Dmitrievich Sytin i ego delo* [Moscow, 2003], 63-64). Regarding the populist revival of Dostoevskii, we would also like to mention the publication, in 1891, of a small volume entitled *The Tasks of the Russian People* (*Zadachi russkogo naroda*), edited by the Tolstoian socio-revolutionary L. P. Nikiforov. The volume, addressing not the popular reader but the educators of the people, included extracts from Dostoevskii's *Diary of a Writer* of January 1877. See F. M. Dostoevskii, *Zadachi russkogo naroda*. Sostavleno po Dnevniku pisatel'ia L. P. Nikiforovym (St. Petersburg, 1891). Nikiforov's commitment was praised by L.N. Tolstoi in his letter to L. P. Nikiforov of 31 March 1891, in Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 65, 280.

184 F. M. Dostoevskii, *Muzhik Marei*. *Stoletniaia* (St. Petersburg, 1885); *Mal'chik u Khrista na elke* (St. Petersburg, 1885); *Letniaia pora* (St. Petersburg, 1886); *Predstavlenie* (St. Petersburg, 1886); *Veruiushchie baby* (St. Petersburg, 1886); *V barskom pansione* (St. Petersburg, 1887).

185 F. M. Dostoevskii, *Bednye liudi* ("Deshevaia biblioteka" N. 60) (St. Petersburg, 1887).

186 On the educational tasks of children's literature in Russia in the second half of nineteenth century see B. Hellman, *Fairy Tales and True Stories. The History of Russian Literature for Children and Young People (1574-2010)* (Leiden-Boston, 2013), 77-168.

Dostoevskii's texts to the needs of this new "theoretical public"<sup>187</sup> provided questionable results. Especially significant is the case of *Notes from the House of the Dead*, one of the works in Dostoevskii's catalogue that saw the largest number of reprints—partial, complete or edited—in the period we examine. In addition to the editions contained in the *Complete Collection* of his works, after Dostoevskii's death, the novel was republished in book form in 1881 (fifth edition), in 1883 (sixth edition), in 1896 (thirteenth edition), in 1900 (fourteenth edition) and in 1905 (seventeenth edition).<sup>188</sup> Where did this interest in *Notes* come from? First of all, from its documentary character: the vivacity and compassion with which Dostoevskii had first described the living conditions of the deportees were a source of inspiration for many other pioneers of the "gold" that glittered "under a coarse crust".<sup>189</sup> But there is also another factor that must be considered: although in his private letters Dostoevskii defined his new novel the "notes of an unknown man" and insisted on the artifice of the narrative ego, so as to untangle it from his personal experience,<sup>190</sup> the audience, as he himself had foreseen, was intrigued by the proximity of the subject of the novel to the experience actually lived by the author. Thus writes L. F. Panteleev, recalling the ovation that the audience awarded Dostoevskii after his public reading of the novel in 1862: "His literary glory was still budding, but in him they honoured the martyr".<sup>191</sup> In the following years, such curiosity did not seem to decrease. As Dostoevskaia recalls, the decision to print the fourth edition in two thousand copies (1875), exactly ten years after Stellovskii's, was dictated by the need to satisfy the booksellers' requests.<sup>192</sup> Similarly, Dostoevskaia was "forced" to publish the fifth edition (1881) immediately after her husband's death: "*Notes from the House of the Dead* and the posthumous number of *Diary of a*

187 Robert Escarpit describes selection as the first of the publisher's three functions: "Selection presupposes that the publisher—or his delegate—imagines a possible public and chooses from the mass of writing that is submitted to him the works best suited for that public [...] From the beginning of the study, preliminary to actual manufacturing, the public must be kept constantly in mind. Depending on whether the house is thinking in terms of a handsome volume destined for a few hundred bibliophiles or a popular, cheap book, everything changes: the paper, the format, the typography [...], the illustrations, the binding and, especially, the number of copies to be printed" (Escarpit, *Sociology of Literature*, 52).

188 The subsequent edition was published in 1911 by the publishing house "Prosveshchenie."

189 "Believe it or not, there are profound, strong, marvelous personalities there, and how delightful it was to find gold under a coarse crust" (Dostoevskii's letter to Mikhail Dostoevskii, 30 January-22 February 1854, in Dostoevsky, *Complete letters*, vol. 1, 190)

190 "My person will disappear. These are notes of an unknown person" (Dostoevskii's letter to Mikhail Dostoevskii, 9 October 1859, *Ibid.*, 390). Then he continued: "The interest will be most capital. There will be serious and gloomy and humorous things [...] and finally, the main thing—my name. Remember that Pleshcheev attributed the success of his poems to his name (do you understand?)" (*Ibid.*).

191 L. F. Panteleev, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow, 1958), 225. Panteleev refers to an evening organized by the Literary Fund in St. Petersburg on March 2, 1862.

192 Dostoevskaia, *Solntse moei zhizni*, 327.

Writer were especially in demand, and in the first few months I had to send these two editions to the press".<sup>193</sup> *Notes from the House of the Dead* and *The Diary of a Writer* were perceived by the public as autobiographical works, which offered the reader the opportunity to learn about the personality of the author and the legendary circumstances of his life: this partly explains why the *House of the Dead* became so popular again after Dostoevskii died at the height of his popularity. The particular editorial case of *Notes from the House of the Dead* includes not only the reprints, but also the numerous publications of individual parts of the novel, sometimes adapted to the needs of specific categories of readers. As early as 1863, an adapted version of the chapter "Akul'ka's Husband" ("Akul'kin muzh") had been published in a collection of stories—later confiscated by the censorship—written by people close to the founder of the revolutionary organization "Land and Liberty" ("Zemlia i Volia"), N. A. Serno-Solov'evich. The political reasons for this choice were clarified in the editors' final gloss: "Here's how people die! [...] Our best forces have died in vain, they have died illegally, without remedy. And whose fault is this? Whose is it, then?".<sup>194</sup> Between the 1880s and the 1890s, *Notes from the House of the Dead* was also republished in editions aimed at the lower classes: consider, for example, Suvorin's two illustrated economic editions of 1886 or the publication, in 1894, of illustrations to the novel in the illustrated weekly *Rodina*, which, according to an expression attributed to its publisher A. A. Kaspari, featured "the most uneducated Russians" among its readers.<sup>195</sup>

Appropriately selected and revised, the text of *Notes from the House of the Dead* therefore lent itself to very different facets of the public, including children. In 1864, one of the brightest chapters of the novel, "The Performance" ("Predstavlenie"), was included in the second edition (1864) of the *Russian Collection* (*Russkaia khrestomatiia*), edited by Andrei Filonov. This collection was re-edited several times in the following years and was very appreciated by school-age readers, as evidenced in this account by a former self-taught person who later became a teacher in popular schools: "I very much loved reading the anthologies of Polevoi and Filonov [...]. In general, I read almost every page of the anthologies with interest, and I kept reading them over and over again."<sup>196</sup> Together with *Poor Folk*,<sup>197</sup> *Notes from the House of the Dead* was for many years the only Dostoevskii work included in chrestomathies—and, in any case, it remained the one with the

193 Ibid., 481.

194 *Sbornik rasskazov. V proze i stikhakh* (St. Petersburg, 1863), 124.

195 Quoted from Starozhil, "Metranpazh Nekrasova," *Solntse Rossii*, 1913, 3, 14. See Suvorin's editions of *Letniaia pora: iz "Zapisok iz Mertvogo doma"* (St. Petersburg, 1886) and *Predstavlenie. Iz "Zapisok iz Mertvogo doma"* (St. Petersburg, 1886).

196 Lederle, *Mneniia russkikh liudei*, 91.

197 Excerpts from the novel had appeared in *Russkaia istoricheskaiia khrestomatiia* (862-1850). Sost. K. Petrov (St. Petersburg, 1866), 542-550.

highest number of appearances, surpassing texts likely more suitable for a children's audience, such as "The Peasant Marey" and some parts of *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>198</sup>

In the 1880s, besides in Suvorin's pocket-sized books, other extracts from *Notes from the House of the Dead* were included in two miscellaneous collections for children: *To Russian Children. From the Writings of F. M. Dostoevskii* (Russkim detiam. Iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo) and *A Selection from the Writings of F. M. Dostoevskii for middle-aged students (from 14 years old)* (Vybor iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo dlia uchashchikhsia srednego vozrasta [ot 14-ti let]).<sup>199</sup> The publication of these two volumes was, according to Dostoevskaia, the realization of a longstanding dream of her husband's: "Fedor Mikhailovich dreamed of choosing passages from his works that could be given to children."<sup>200</sup> The widow made every effort to have her husband's work included in the catalogues of school libraries, but her efforts often clashed with evidence that Dostoevskii's novels and stories had not been designed for children. Only in some cases did the state officials responsible for compiling and modifying the list of permitted books accept Dostoevskaia's requests, according to criteria that are not always intelligible, and in any case far from consistent. For example, the short stories "The Peasant Marey" and "A Centenary" ("Stoletniaia"), published together in 1885 illustrated edition, were approved by the Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Popular Education in 1885 for school-pupil libraries of middle schools and popular schools; in 1896 for school-pupil libraries of city schools and teacher libraries of primary schools; and in 1900 for free public reading halls (besplatnye narodnye chital'ny). In 1886 "The Peasant Marey" and "A Centenary" also were approved by the Department of the Institutions of Empress Maria for reading in rural schools and preparatory classes of girls' schools, but in 1897 they were rejected by the Scholastic Council Under the Holy Synod for church parish schools.<sup>201</sup> Regarding these same

198 Cf. A. V. Vdovin, "Prilozhenie 2. Chastotnost' avtorov i ikh tekstov v russkikh khrestomatiakh XIX veka (1805-1912)," A. V. Vdovin, R. G. Leibov (eds.), *Khrestomatiinye teksty: russkaia pedagogicheskaiia praktika XIX v. i poeticheskii kanon* (Tartu, 2013), 316.

199 *Russkim detiam. Iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo*, pod red. O. F. Millera (St. Petersburg, 1883); *Vybor iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo dlia uchashchikhsia srednego vozrasta (ot 14-ti let)*, pod red. V. Ia. Stoiunina (St. Petersburg, 1887. Second edition in 1902).

200 Letter from A. G. Dostoevskaia to E. F. Iunge, 16 November 1882 ("Dostoevskii v neizdannoi perepiske sovremennikov," 558-559).

201 IRLI, f. 100, n. 29525, "Otnosheniia k A. G. Dostoevskoi Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia," 14 April 1885; n. 29526, "Otnosheniia k A. G. Dostoevskoi Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia" 3 February 1900; n. 29528, "Otnoshenie k A. G. Dostoevskoi Vedomstva Uchrezhdenii Imperatritsy Marii," 1 December 1886; n. 29529, "Otnoshenie k A. G. Dostoevskoi Uchilshchnogo soveta pri Sviateishem sinode," 25 November 1897. Starting from the mid-1880s, "The Peasant Marey" and "A Centenary" appeared in official lists of books for primary and secondary school-libraries and for public readings: *Opyt kataloga uchenicheskikh bibliotek srednikh uchebnykh zavedenii vedomstva Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia* (St. Petersburg, 1889), 70; *Katalog knig dlia upotrebleniia v nizshikh uchilshchakh vedomstva*



stories, the pedagogical critique was not unanimous either: Alchevskaia expressed doubts about their suitability for popular readers, both young and adult, due to their excessively “fantastic”<sup>202</sup> nature, while other reviewers believed these stories to be the only ones that, with some adaptations, could also be offered to a young audience.<sup>203</sup> A particularly significant case revealing the differences between regulatory and social reading practices is Dostoevskii’s short story “The Boy at Christ’s Christmas Party,” taken from the 1876 *Diary of a Writer*. Although it had been published starting from the 1880s in several children’s collections, included in Suvorin’s successful pocket-sized editions, and considered by popular pedagogues and readers to be one of Dostoevskii’s best works,<sup>204</sup> “The Boy at Christ’s Christmas Party” did not obtain the approval of the Ministry of Popular Education to feature in free public reading halls and libraries until 1905.<sup>205</sup>

*Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia* (St. Petersburg, 1891), 59; *Katalog knig dlia upotrebleniia v nizshikh uchilishchakh vedomstva Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia i dlia publichnykh narodnykh chtenii* (St. Petersburg, 1897), 115; *Katalog knig dlia upotrebleniia v nizshikh uchilishchakh vedomstva Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia i dlia publichnykh narodnykh chtenii* (St. Petersburg, 1901), 193; *Katalog knig dlia upotrebleniia v nizshikh uchilishchakh vedomstva Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia i dlia publichnykh narodnykh chtenii (po iun’ 1901). Otdel III. Knigi dlia uchenicheskikh bibliotek i dlia publichnykh narodnykh chtenii* (St. Petersburg, 1905), 78. On state officials supervising children’s reading in prerevolutionary Russia see O. Luchkina, “Instituty rekomendatel’noi bibliografii dlia detskogo chteniia v dorevoliutsionnoi Rossii,” *Vestnik Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. A. S. Pushkina*, 1 (3), 22-34. On the Russian prerevolutionary educational system in the 1880s and 1890s see Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read*, 35-58 and passim; B. Eklof, *Russian Peasant Schools: Officialdom, Village Culture, and Popular Pedagogy, 1861-1914* (Berkeley, 1986), 97-119. On the spread and the holdings of school-libraries in the countryside in the 1890s and 1900s see B. Eklof, “The Archaeology of ‘Backwardness’ in Russia: Assessing the Adequacy of Libraries for Rural Audiences in Late Imperial Russia,” in M. Remnek (ed.), *The Space of the Book. Print Culture in the Russian Social Imagination* (Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2011), 108-141.

<sup>202</sup> *Chto chitat’ narodu? Kriticheskii ukazatel’ knig dlia narodnogo i detskogo chteniia* (St. Petersburg, 1889), vol. 2, 507.

<sup>203</sup> Iakov, “Mal’chik u Khrista na elke. Rasskaz F. M. Dostoevskogo. SPb. 1885. Ts. 5 kop.; Muzhik Marei. Stoletniaia. F. M. Dostoevskogo. SPb. 1885. Ts. 10 k.,” *Pedagogicheskii listok*, 2 (1885), 136; N. P.-i-a, “Mal’chik u Khrista na elke. Rasskaz F. M. Dostoevskogo. SPb. 1885. Ts. 5 kop.; Muzhik Marei. Stoletniaia. F. M. Dostoevskogo. SPb. 1885. Ts. 10 k.,” *Zhenskoe obrazovanie*, 8 (1885), 551-552.

<sup>204</sup> Besides the already mentioned editions, in the 1880s and 1890s “The Boy at Christ’s Christmas Party,” appeared in several miscellaneous collections: *Tridtsat’ luchshikh novykh skazok. Sobral i razrabotal dlia detei V.P. Avenarius* (St. Petersburg, 1887); *Otrada i mecht’y bednykh detei* (St. Petersburg, 1892); *Skazki russkikh pisatelei dlia detei*. Sbornik izdannyi redaktsei gazety “Kievskoe slovo” (Kiev, 1893); *Skazki russkikh pisatelei. Sbornik* (Kiev, 1897). As for Dostoevskaia’s economic editions, annual income from his 1885 edition of “The Boy at Christ’s Christmas Party” (each copy costed 10 copecks) amounted to 150-200 roubles (Letter from A. G. Dostoevskaia to S. A. Tolstaia, 1 October 1885, in Nikiforova, “Pis’ma A. G. Dostoevskoi k S. A. Tolstoi,” 300). According to research conducted on eight Sunday schools in 1893-94, “The Boy at Christ’s Christmas Party” was one of the preferred readings of both adult and younger female pupils (mainly peasants and workers); see E. A. Andreeva, “Kakie knigi chitaiutsia v voskresnoi shkole,” *Chastnyi pochini v dele narodnogo obrazovaniia* (Moscow, 1894), 330.

<sup>205</sup> IRLI, F. 100, N. 29525. Otnosheniia k A. G. Dostoevskoi Min. Nar. Prosv., 3 August 1905.



On the one hand, this lack of homogeneity is explained by the extreme diversification of the Russian prerevolutionary educational system and its evident lack of alignment with the students' extra-curricular readings (See LEIBOV, VDOVIN, "What and How Russian Students Read in Schools," in the present volume); on the other, it is also due to Dostoevskii's controversial reputation as a 'children's author.' In fact, if the 'humanitarian' themes—the morally and physically degraded settings, the poverty and the hunger, the "accidental character" (*sluchainost'*) of Russian families, the suffering of children, the contrast between the world of the rich and that of the poor, together with the pathetic-sentimental tone of the Dostoevskian narrator—share some aspects with the populist pedagogical thought regarding compassion toward the weakest, the intricate Dostoevskian style made his texts almost inaccessible to a reader not yet fully formed: the convoluted syntax, the widespread use of inversions and repetitions, the alternation of different stylistic registers, the fast pace of narration all contravened the basic pedagogical principles of order, concision, and clarity. More importantly, Dostoevskii's tendency to dwell on the darker and murkier sides of the human personality, the mystical nature of some of his characters, and the exasperation caused by their pain and suffering all aroused the interest of some who, from the variegated sample of child characters offered by his novels, found material for scientific observations of an anthropological and psychological nature<sup>206</sup>—but evoked only bewilderment in many others. Dostoevskii's characters lacked the clear moral integrity, the genuine patriotic feeling, the harmonious vision of nature that were considered indispensable educational requirements for a children's novel or story.<sup>207</sup>

Proof of this is the disputed popularizing work of the scholar Orest Miller, an early biographer of Dostoevskii and one of the most fervent advocates of the educational potential in his works. His long-standing friendship with Dostoevskii, and the deep respect that Miller had always nurtured for him, convinced his widow to open the doors of his personal archive, allowing Miller to write Dostoevskii's aforementioned first posthumous biography, which was published in the first volume of the Collection of Dostoevskii's works in 1882-1883.<sup>208</sup> Between 1882 and 1883, moreover, Miller had dedicated to Dostoevskii a series of public readings and lectures which were advertised in the press and attracted hundreds of listeners. Having already written a long article entitled "Children in F. M. Dostoevskii's Works," pub-

206 R. A. Iantareva, *Detskie tipy v proizvedeniakh Dostoevskogo. Psikhologicheskie etiudy* (St. Petersburg, 1895); A. Podosenova, "Russkie deti," *Knizhki nedeli*, 1898, n. 2, 161-173; 8, 158-176.

207 Cf. O. Luchkina, "Raison d'être russkoi klassiki: poety-pedagogi i pisateli-vospitateli," *Detskie chteniia*, 8, 2 (2015), 30-51.

208 On this work see N. Perlina, "Pervaia posmertnaia biografia F. M. Dostoevskogo – analiz istochnikov," *Russian Language Journal*, 102 (1975), 42-56.

lished in the journal *Zhenskoe obrazovanie* in 1882,<sup>209</sup> Miller was also the editor of the miscellaneous edition published by Dostoevskaia and released in three thousand copies the following year, the previously mentioned *To Russian Children*. This volume, costing 2.5 roubles (3.25 with cover), had a refined appearance. On the burgundy cover, there was a golden oval portrait of Dostoevskii, framed by two intertwined laurel branches; above the portrait, also printed in gilded letters, there appeared the title, which left no doubt as to the recipients of the book: the *Russian* children, thus confirming the role of national paladin that Dostoevskii had achieved for himself thanks to his “Speech on Pushkin.” Reinforcing the function of the title was the book’s dedication to Dostoevskii’s two children, who were thus evoked as guarantors of the paternal and reassuring aura which the publisher wanted to attribute to the author.<sup>210</sup> On the content page,<sup>211</sup> next to the titles of the works, the editor placed the titles of the individual excerpts, which in some cases he had reformulated with the clear purpose of softening the impact of the texts’ “adult” themes, such as pain and death. For example, the title of the last fragment of the chapter “Iliushechka” (this diminutive of the child’s name does not feature in the original version), taken from the epilogue of *The Brothers Karamazov*, had been modified from the original “Iliushechka’s Funeral” (Pokhorony Iliushechki) into a more reassuring “Send-off” (Provody). In his preface, Miller made his debut remembering the heartfelt participation of children in Dostoevskii’s funeral, and presented the volume, published during the Christmas season, as a token of gratitude from the deceased for that manifestation of affection. In addition to Miller’s proclaimed intention of dedicating this “present to be placed under the Christmas tree” for children, another implicit interlocutor also emerged from his words:

This present from the deceased will seem to many too sad for children. In fact, there is much talk of children’s pain, and also of any other type of pain. But the deceased, not by chance, said that in his works there is also joy, the mere joy of the soul, the highest

209 O. F. Miller, “Deti v sochineniakh F. M. Dostoevskogo,” *Zhenskoe obrazovanie*, 2 (1882), 107-122; 3 (1882), 190-206.

210 On the function of dedicatees see G. Genette, *The Paratext. Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1997), 131-136.

211 From *Poor Folk*, “Iz zapisok Varin’ki Dobroselovoi”; from *Netochka Nezvanova*, “Netochka i Katia”; from *The Insulted and Humiliated*, “Rasskaz sirotki Nelli”; from *Notes from the House of the Dead*, “Letniaia pora v tiur’mu”; from *Crime and Punishment*, “Smert’ Marmeladova”; from *The Diary of a Writer*, “Mal’chik u Khrista na elke,” “Stoletniaia,” “Foma Danilov, zamuchennyi russkii geroi”; from *The Raw Youth*, “V barskom pensione”; from *The Brothers Karamazov*, “Starets i poslushnik: - Iz vospominanii Inoka Zosimy”; Alesha; “*Iliushechka*: - Shkol’niki – U kapitana – Kolia Krasotkin – Zhuchka – U Iliushechkoi postel’ki – Doktor – Provody”)

kind of it. Children will be able to capture this joy, perhaps even better than adults.<sup>212</sup>

The editor's *excusatio not petita* acquires meaning in light of the ferocious attack, indirectly also addressed to Miller himself, that N. K. Mikhailovskii had launched the year prior against Dostoevskii's "cruel talent," which he thought guilty of oppressing the masses with senseless exaltation of pain, inducing them to suffer violence and abuse passively.<sup>213</sup> Thus, in an attempt to prevent the objections of those who may consider Dostoevskii's works unsuitable for children on the basis of their darkness and anguish, Miller's introduction justified his edition by appealing to the many child characters in Dostoevskii's texts, and to the value of discovering one's own or others' suffering as a fundamental moment in a child's moral and cognitive development—and indeed, a necessary step in the transition to adult life. The pedagogical assumption from which Miller proceeded was therefore not far from that evoked by Alchevskaia in her article on the *Bibliography Sheet*: the educational value of Dostoevskii's works lay not in any foregrounding of positive ethical-behavioural models, but in showing the harmfulness of *anti*-models, whose consequences were taken to extremes. The 'Dostoevskian method' therefore placed itself in sharp contrast with the pedagogical thought of the time, the pivotal points of which lay in the gradual development of the child's personality and in the transmission of positive values, which would stimulate the naturally optimistic nature of the child.<sup>214</sup>

On the one hand, despite his efforts, Miller left himself open to criticism, which was not late in coming. The main objection concerned the intended recipient of the volume, which had been made so explicit in the title: more than a book 'for' children, Miller's could be considered a book 'about' children, which could perhaps be useful to educators as a compendium of child psychological types.<sup>215</sup> The most severe criticisms, however, concerned the very *raison d'être* of the volume. It is precisely the "cruel talent" thesis that seems to be the subtext of all the reviews of the *Russkim detiam* volume, including that penned by Mikhailovskii himself; he contested Miller's desire to administer suffering to young readers as a virtue to be conquered.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>212</sup> "Predislovie," *Russkim detiam*, I.

<sup>213</sup> N. K. Mikhailovskii, "Zhestokii talant" (1882), in Idem, *Literaturnaia kritika. Stat'i o russkoi literature XIX-nachala XX veka* (Leningrad, 1989), 153-234. In this article, Mikhailovskii likened Miller to a "woodpecker," who, with stubborn fidelity, magnified Dostoevskii's talents, raising him to the role of moral guide of the Russian people.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. O. Rogova, "Lektsii po detskoj literature," *Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, 11 (1889), 444-446.

<sup>215</sup> "Bibliografii i kritika. Russkim detiam," *Zapiski uchitel'ia*, 4 (1883), 209-210; "Obzor detskikh knig za 1883," *Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, 9 (1884), 286-290.

<sup>216</sup> "Novye knigi," *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 3 (1883), 74. For other reviews to Miller's volume see N., "Chto nashi deti chitaiut?," *Sankt-Peterburgskie vedomosti*, 13 December 1883; M.

On the other hand, Miller's heavy editing of the texts denotes his will to transmit to the young reader only an idealized vision of suffering, free from brutal details that could make it too realistic. For instance, the choice to include a fragment of *Notes from the House of the Dead* ("Summertime in Prison" ["Letniiaia pora v tiur'me"]) was explained by Miller thus: "Let our children learn to understand why people call even deported prisoners simply 'unfortunate.' May they learn to understand that even in these people the spark of God cannot go out altogether, and that a neighbour's duty is to not let it extinguish in others."<sup>217</sup> Of course, Miller's educational purposes could only be implemented by radically intervening in the text: for this reason, the published version was heavily edited, eliminating the initial digression on the deportees who try to escape from their place of imprisonment, the description of the disarray caused by the news of the general arriving from Petersburg, and then the entire final part of the chapter, replaced by excerpts from the following chapter, "Prison Animals" ("Katorzhnye zhivotnye").<sup>218</sup>

The second volume mentioned, aimed at adolescent readers, was published by Dostoevskaia in 1887 and put on sale at the cost of 2 roubles. In addition to the integral versions of *Poor Folk*, "Mr. Prokharchin" ("Gospodin Prokharchin") and *Netochka Nezvanova*, the volume included some fragments from *Notes from the House of the Dead*.<sup>219</sup> In the absence of a preface, the content of the volume can only be interpreted in relation to the pedagogical method of the curator, V.Ia. Stoiunin. In his frequently reprinted work *On the Teaching of Russian Literature* (*O prepodavanii russkoi literatury*, 1864), Stoiunin suggested studying a literary work from the point of view not of its aesthetic qualities, but of the moral and behavioural ideals transmitted by it: the conversations between the teacher and the pupil about the work would help the latter to identify himself with the characters' situations and learn from them. Precisely to ensure this effect, Stoiunin recommended presenting to the young reader not individual fragments taken from more than one work, but two or three works in their entirety:

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Tsebrikova, "Mimo tseli (Russkim detiam. Iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo. Izdano pod redatsiei O. F. Millera)," *Pedagogicheskii listok*, 1 (1883), 1-33.

<sup>217</sup> *Russkim detiam*, II.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* Although dismissed by many as controversial and inappropriate, *To Russian Children* was quite successful among young readers, as attested by this survey on cadets' home readings during Christmas holidays in 1882-1883: "Chto chitaiut nashi deti?," *Pedagogicheskii sbornik*, 5 (1883), 409-416.

<sup>219</sup> *Vybor iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo dlia uchashchikhsia srednego vozrasta (ot 14-ti let)*, pod red. V. Ia. Stoiunina (St. Petersburg, 1887). The volume included the following fragments from *Notes from the House of the Dead*: "Introduction" ("Vvedenie"); "The Dead House" ("Mertvyi dom"), "Akim Akimych," "An Old Believer" ("Starover"), "Sirotkin," "Leznig-Nurra," "Alej," "Sushilov," "Petrov," "Isai Fomich," "The Christmas Holiday" ("Prazdnik Rozhdestva Khristova"), "The Performance" ("Predstavlenie"), "Prison Animals" ("Katorzhnye zhivotnye"), "The Release" ("Vykhod iz katorgi").

To tell of this or that work in a synthetic way is a superfluous and useless task: can a bad lithograph give even a vague idea of the splendid painting of a brilliant artist? Is it possible, based only on fragments, to analyse a work and judge its qualities, when only the dark contours of the figures remain, while what constitutes their life and soul has disappeared?<sup>220</sup>

However, this criterion obviously did not apply to *Notes from the House of the Dead*, which, adapted and reformulated in a sort of gallery of portraits of the different characters and different moments in the life of the deportees, recreated a world that appeared, if not sweetened, certainly distant from that described in the original.<sup>221</sup> If the reasons for this radical intervention in the text of *Notes from the House of the Dead* stem from the obvious need to preserve young readers from a premature contact with deviant behaviours, which could arouse the dangerous desire to emulate those behaviors, less obvious are the reasons that led the pedagogues of the time to consider this novel, in spite of everything, an instructive text, good to train the younger generations and to educate the lower class. In this regard, the words of Alchevskaia, one of the most strenuous supporters of the educational value of Dostoevskii's works, can be of help. During these same years, she also read to her female pupils at Kharkiv's Sunday school extracts from *Notes from the House of the Dead* (from the 1875 fourth edition):

They may ask us: why did you concentrate on *Notes from the House of the Dead* and not on some other of Dostoevskii's works? — Because, we will answer, this work alone is dedicated to describing the people and must therefore be closer to them than

220 V. Ia. Stoiunin, *O prepodavanii russkoi literatury* (St. Petersburg, 1879), 15.

221 In a letter to Dostoevskaia dated November 28, 1886, V. Ia. Stoiunin shares his fears about the reception of the volume: "In the press for the public, I usually connect my name with such independent work, which required real effort from me, whereas I cannot say that here I made any effort; I just read and made notes with a pencil; but I didn't know and I'm not sure that I made a good choice, because I would like it to have educational value, and this question is not easy to solve: whoever wishes to can find fault in it without difficulty; and I don't have the slightest desire to respond and start a polemic with our clever people and critics" (IRLI, f. 100, n. 30281). Despite Stoiunin's fears, the volume received good reviews. Moreover, in 1896 it was approved by the Ministry of Popular Education for pupils' libraries of secondary urban schools and for teachers' libraries of primary schools (IRLI, f. 100, n. 29527. Otnosheniia k A. G. Dostoevskoi Min. Nar. Prosv., 17 August 1896), and in 1902 a second edition was released: *Vybor iz sochinenii F. M. Dostoevskogo dlia uchashchikhsia srednego vozrasta (ot 14-ti let)*. Pod redaktsiei V. Ia. Stoiunina. S portretom F. M. Dostoevskogo (St. Petersburg, 1902). 2-e izdanie. Razreshen Ministerstvom Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia k upotrebleniiu v uchenicheskikh bibliotekakh gorodskikh uchilishch i v uchitel'skikh bibliotekakh nachal'nykh shkol. Tip. br. Panteleevykh.

many others, despite the fact that even its author did not intend it for popular reading.<sup>222</sup>

The edits that Alchevskaia made to alter Dostoevskii's text show that, although she defined *Notes from the House of the Dead* a novel "close to the people," she considered as such only those specific depictions and scenes that did not show the environmental and human aberration of the world of deportees. For example, when reading the first chapter, Alchevskaia deliberately omitted several passages: those in which it was said that among criminals the majority were educated people and that there were some who believed that education killed people; the "incomprehensible reflections" in which the author observes that "crime cannot be examined from ready-for-use points of view, and that its philosophy is a little more complex than one might think"; the story of a person convicted for parricide; and finally, the narrator's considerations on the crime of smuggling and on the smuggler who supposedly worked "out of passion, by vocation."<sup>223</sup> The edits made by Alchevskaia therefore concerned not only passages that contained cruel descriptions or vulgar characters, but also those that could confuse the reader, who is "separated from us by an abyss,"<sup>224</sup> through the subtle ambiguity in statements by the narrator. What emerges from analysis of the young Kharkiv pupils' reactions is a particular type of reading: they compared what they heard with their personal experience and identified themselves with the destiny of this or that character, but did so without being able to rework their impressions within the entire context of the novel. Comments on the passages they read were reduced to single statements conditioned by their primordial rural religious sensitivity:

- It's so interesting to learn about how they live, the poor, and what they do! This is indeed far from us, here you could never see anyone who has been there, and you cannot hear of how people live in Siberia.

"I know an old Polish man," said another female pupil, "who goes around the courtyards to chop wood and also comes to us. It's so interesting to listen to him, when he starts telling stories! He too was deported for murder.

- And are you not afraid of him?, asked the first student.

- Not at all! - answered the second - He's so good! As if he had never killed anyone.

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222 Kh. D. Alchevskaia, *Chto chitat' narodu?*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1884), 74. See also *Ibid.*, 288-291.

223 *Ibid.*, 74.

224 *Ibid.*

- Even if he has killed someone, he has repented - observed a third one - perhaps he has been expiating his sins his entire life.<sup>225</sup>

Alchevskaia wrote again about *Notes from the House of the Dead* in the second volume of *What Should Be Read to the People?* (*Chto chitat' narodu?*), in which she revealed the disappointing results of a reading performed before adult peasants. Taking into consideration the two fragments of the novel that had repeatedly been published in economic editions, "Summertime" (*Letniaia pora*) and "The Performance" (*Predstavlenie*), Alchevskaia, with regard to the first, attributed the poor attention of the audience to some of Dostoevskii's expressions, which were incomprehensible to a peasant reader; for the same reasons, Alchevskaia even decided not to read the second extract, which describes the staging of a theatrical performance in prison.<sup>226</sup> Alchevskaia's doubts and her appeals to publishers to put out an appropriately adapted version of the text did not prevent *Notes from the House of the Dead* from entering, in 1896, the list of books approved for public reading halls in the villages (*narodnye chital'ni*)—and remaining in the next two editions of the list.<sup>227</sup> Surprisingly, the approval concerned the complete edition of 1882, while the adaptations of "Summertime" and "The Performance" in

225 Ibid., 73-74.

226 *Chto chitat' narodu? Kriticheskii ukazatel' knig dlia narodnogo i detskogo chteniia*, 507-509. Alchevskaia's experiments with Dostoevskii's works were harshly criticized by other culture activists. S. A. An-skii (Rappoport) attributed the failure of her readings of excerpts taken from *Notes from the House of the Dead* to the practice of extrapolating individual fragments, which mutilated the literary text and altered the message, making it even more incomprehensible to the popular reader (S. A. An-skii, *Ocherki narodnoi literatury* [St. Petersburg, 1894], 128). Similarly, Rubakin had pointed to the difference between listening to a text and reading it: "Firstly, from the fact that some of our best writers' works, when they were read aloud, were understood and produced a great impression among the people, we must not conclude that all the works by these writers will be understood and will produce the same impression. From the fact that the people can understand works of a certain kind, it does not follow that they can read them: listening and reading on one's own are absolutely not the same thing. It is not simple for an uneducated reader to read, almost syllable by syllable, a long sentence by Dostoevskii: by the time he has finished reading it, he will have already forgotten the beginning. A book for the people must facilitate their understanding, which is not possible when presenting Dostoevskii's works to the people" (N. A. Rubakin, *Opyt programmy dlia issledovaniia literatury dlia naroda* [St. Petersburg, 1889], 4).

227 *Katalog knig dlia besplatnykh narodnykh chitalen*. Izdan po raspriazheniiu Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia (St. Petersburg, 1896), 80. This catalogue included the following editions of Dostoevskii's works: *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 14 vols., St. Petersburg 1883; *Muzhik Marei. Stoletniaia*. St. Petersburg 1885; *Bednye liudi*. St. Petersburg (without year of publication); *Zapiski iz Mertvogo doma*. St. Petersburg, 1882. The second edition of this catalogue included the same editions (*Katalog knig dlia besplatnykh narodnykh chitalen*. Izdan po raspriazheniiu Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia. Izdaniie 2-oe, dopolnennoe. St. Petersburg, 1897, 88). The third edition of this catalogue, besides the aforementioned works, included Dostoevskaia's 1891 edition of *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (*Katalog knig dlia besplatnykh narodnykh chitalen*. Izdan po raspriazheniiu Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia. Izdaniie 3-e, dopolnennoe, St. Petersburg, 1900, 107).



1885 cheap editions were rejected.<sup>228</sup> But there is another factor here even more interesting and significant, not only in regards to the internal contradictions within the offices responsible for regulating reading, but also the particular nature of Dostoevskii's case: only a few years later, in 1898, the Ministry of Popular Education expunged all works by Dostoevskii from the lists of books recommended for the people, defining their past authorisation a "misunderstanding" and justifying their banning on the basis of the "very diverse, sometimes diametrically opposed views" stirred by Dostoevskii's works.<sup>229</sup>

In conclusion, much remains to be investigated concerning the circulation and reception of Dostoevskii's works among and by real readers—a topic studied so far almost exclusively with regard to *Diary of a Writer* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, a circumstance due, no doubt, to the objective difficulty of finding sources. From this analysis a substantial correspondence emerges between the success of Dostoevskii's work (even with its changing fortunes, which saw successive alternations between vertiginous rises and dramatic falls in terms of its popularity)<sup>230</sup> and developments in reading and publishing in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century (see REITBLAT, "The Reading Audience of the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century", in the present volume). In the sixties and the seventies the circulation of Dostoevskii's works was essentially limited to the cultured circuit and his audience included mainly educated readers, both nobles and *raznochintsy* (literary critics, social activists, students at universities, bureaucrats, provincial intelligentsia, etc.).<sup>231</sup> After 1881 the diversified publishing production of his works led to an expansion of his audience, which came to include half-educated readers and readers of lower classes (pupils in primary and secondary schools, merchants, literate workers and peasants, etc.). The conquest of new categories of readers exposed Dostoevskii's works to new and especially interesting 're-readings': the cases of the complete collection

228 IRLI, f. 100, n. 29525. Otnosheniia k A. G. Dostoevskoi Min. Nar. Prosv., 16 October 1896.

229 Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii Arkhiv (RGIA), St. Petersburg, f. 734, op. 3, d. 84, ll. 762-762 ob. See the 1902 edition of *Spisok knig, razreshennykh Ministerstvom Narodnogo Prosveshcheniia (s iuliia 1900 goda po iul' 1902 goda) dlia publichnykh narodnykh chtenii, besplatnykh bibliotek chitalen, uchenicheskikh i uchitel'skikh bibliotek nizshikh i srednikh uchebnykh zavedenii* (Tver', 1902), in which Dostoevskii's name is not mentioned. Subsequent attempts to propose *Notes from the House of the Dead* to popular readers were led by L. N. Tolstoi, who included two fragments ("Orel" and "Smert' v gosspitale") in his *Reading Circle (Krug chteniia)* (1905).

230 On the 'ups and downs' of the fortunes of Dostoevskii's work see Strakhov, "Vospominaniia," 523.

231 Especially significant is the absence of Dostoevskii from the first, intended for the mass public series of Russian classics "Russian Library" (Russkaia biblioteka, ), edited in 1874-1879 by M. M. Stasiulevich (See LEVITT, "The Making of a National Poet," in the present volume). This series included cheap editions (seventy-five kopecks per volume) of works by A. S. Pushkin, M. Iu. Lermontov, N. V. Gogol', V. A. Zhukovskii, A. S. Griboedov, N. A. Nekrasov, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, I. S. Turgenev, and L. N. Tolstoi.



of his works and of *Notes from the House of the Dead* show that the departure of Dostoevskii's texts from their traditional distribution circuit and the editorial strategies used to increase their dissemination impacted their semantic potential, giving rise to a range of reactions (from censors, from critics, and from the public) that in some way did not correspond either to the intentions of the author or to the expectations of the pedagogue or the publisher. Whether and to what extent these "creative treasons" influenced the reception of Dostoevskii in the following decades are questions that the critical literature still has to face, beyond all the ideological readings and re-readings that Dostoevskii's works underwent in the Soviet era.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> On this see A. V. Blum, "Russkaia klassika XIX veka pod sovetskoi tsenzuroi (po materialam sekretnykh arkhivov Glavlila 30-kh godov)," *Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie*, 32 (1998), 434, 437-438.



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